

Arafat to visit Jordan today

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AFP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat is due in Jordan on Sunday for talks with King Hussein, his spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina said on Saturday. The meeting follows on from talks between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Washington this week, which the Palestinian cabinet said on Saturday "had failed because of Israeli intransigence." Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said Thursday that the Washington talks failed to achieve any progress despite four separate meetings since Tuesday. Mr. Erekat said U.S. proposals for a step-by-step Israeli troop withdrawal from at least 12 per cent of the West Bank in exchange for Palestinians fulfilling Israeli security demands did not meet several Palestinian conditions, including the halt of Israeli settlement expansion.

U.S. calls Arafat comments unhelpful

WASHINGTON (R) — The U.S. State Department on Friday censured as "unhelpful and counter-productive" warnings by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat of a possible return to street violence because of the Middle East peace deadlock. Referring in a speech in the West Bank on Thursday to the "intifada" or uprising launched by Palestinians against Israeli occupation in the late 1980s, Mr. Arafat said they could "start it all over again" if peacekeeping collapsed. "Such statements are unhelpful and counter-productive," U.S. State Department spokesman James Foley told reporters. "We urge all parties to the peace process to avoid statements that undermine confidence."

Golan Druze protest against Israeli occupation

MAJDAL SHAMS (AFP) — Anti-Israeli demonstrations erupted in Druze areas of the Golan Heights on Saturday to mark a 1992 strike against the Israeli occupation of the plateau. Groups of Druze youth waved Syrian flags and hurled stones at Israeli police in the Majd al Shams and Massadah areas, said the witnesses. Police, who had deployed in force in the areas, responded by firing teargas grenades. Two policemen were lightly injured in the clashes. Around 13,000 Israelis have settled on the Golan Heights since 1967. The Golan Druze called a general strike on Tuesday in support of Iraq in its standoff with United Nations weapons inspectors.

River traffic between Egypt, Sudan resumes

ASWAN (AFP) — Maritime traffic on the River Nile between Egypt and Sudan resumed on Saturday after a break of more than three years. Egyptian Transport Minister Suleiman Metwalli said, Mr. Metwalli told reporters that the resumption followed "an initiative by our Sudanese brothers to consolidate relations between the two peoples of the Nile Valley." He was speaking at a ceremony in the southern Egyptian town of Aswan to mark the resumption of traffic. Two boats, one Egyptian and the other Sudanese, will carry passengers and goods between Aswan and Wadi Halfa in northern Sudan. The Egyptian boat, Sinai, made its first run on Saturday with 400 passengers on board.

Israeli-Palestinian lack of trust worrying — Israeli military chief

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — The lack of trust between Israelis and Palestinians was extremely worrying, the head of Israel's armed forces said Friday. "The rapport between the two peoples is going through a deep confidence crisis which can't be put down to a crisis between leaders," General Amnon Shuhav told Israeli public television. He said that "this crisis is certainly affecting the relationship on the ground between Israeli military officers and Palestinian police," adding that he was "very worried by the fact that these people who believed in peace are taking a backward step."

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King calls on Iraq to spare region the disaster of war

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein on Saturday met with Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Sahhaf who delivered a message from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein regarding diplomatic efforts to end the standoff with the United States.

During the meeting, King Hussein stressed the need to contain the crisis and to spare the region from the "ghost of war which will increase the suffering of the Iraqi people and bring disasters to the region," Jordan News Agency, Petra said.

The King also stressed that Iraq should comply with U.N. Security Council resolutions "to spare Iraq the consequences of a military strike," Petra quoted the King as saying.

The King also urged to deal with the crisis "with wisdom and seriousness and not to miss the available opportunities to reach a peaceful solution," Petra reported.

Mr. Sahhaf, who arrived here on the third leg of a regional tour that took him to Syria and Egypt, briefed the King on Iraq's "diplomatic initiatives" to overcome the deadlock.

In a separate meeting with Swedish foreign minister, Lena Hjelm-Wallen, the King said: "I believe that full compliance with U.N. resolutions is a way of defusing it."

"At the same time there should be a way by which the crisis can be resolved without the inevitable disaster that seems to be looming ahead, in



His Majesty King Hussein receives Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf at Raghdan Palace in Amman Saturday (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

terms of some formula that would work," the King said.

The King stressed that a war in the region would be a "disastrous to the whole region and maybe the world."

"We still have another problem that is on the minds of many and in the hearts of many and that is the peace process. Unfortunately it is not moving ahead either," added the King.

"So it is a period of tension and a period of uncertainty as far as the majority of people in the region are concerned," said the King. Mr. Sahhaf, who also held talks with His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, is expected to leave on Monday for Beirut to meet with Lebanese President Elias Hrawi.

During his meeting with the Iraqi official, the Crown Prince pointed out the importance of initiatives made by several Security Council permanent members as well as the U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan to reach a formula "that is accepted by all parties."

During the two separate meetings, the Iraqi official briefed the King and the Crown Prince on Iraq's point of view regarding the Russian and French proposals to resolve the logjam "which Iraq believes meet all requirements to reach a diplomatic breakthrough."

The Iraqi official also said that his country will continue its efforts to reach a "diplomatic solution that preserves its

sovereignty."

Mr. Sahhaf's tour is aimed at presenting Baghdad's position in the crisis, as the U.S. and Britain warn force is inevitable if Iraq does not allow unrestricted weapons inspections.

Mr. Sahhaf is due to meet with French President Jacques Chirac this week in Paris and is expected to deliver a message from the Iraqi president.

Earlier this month, France dispatched the secretary general of its foreign ministry, Bertrand Dufourcq, in an effort to resolve the crisis peacefully.

Russian president's envoy Victor Pavlovsky is still in the Iraqi capital in a bid to find a solution to the crisis, one which would win the approval of all parties.

Wallen's visit reemphasises bilateral friendship — King

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein on Saturday reviewed at the Royal Court with Swedish Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallen and her accompanying delegation bilateral relations, the peace process and the U.N.-Iraqi crisis.

King Hussein stressed during the meeting the need for solving the Iraqi-U.N. crisis through diplomatic means.

King Hussein told reporters that Ms. Wallen's visit to Jordan "means a lot and it really reemphasises the fact that we are friends and that our cooperation has been there."

The King said: "We view things most times in the same way... and we have the same concerns. All of us are working for a better future for the generations to come after us."

Ms. Wallen lauded Jordan's stand towards a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Ms. Wallen who is on a three-day visit to the Kingdom told reporters upon her arrival that her talks with Jordanian officials will focus on bilateral relations, the peace process, as well as the Iraqi question.

"We demand the U.N.-Iraqi crisis be solved in peaceful means and that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein implement the U.N. Security Council resolutions to avert any military escalation," said Ms. Wallen.

For his part, Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh described Jordanian-Swedish relations

as distinguished, pointing out that "this visit will be a good opportunity for consultations on issues of common concern, particularly the peace process in the Middle East region and the partnership agreement between Jordan and the European Union."

Dr. Tarawneh said: "Our bilateral relations have progressed and we want to boost them further in economic and social fields."

The Swedish official is expected to meet His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan and Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and other Jordanian officials.

Ms. Wallen arrived here on Saturday and was received by Dr. Tarawneh and the ministry's senior officials.

Qatari plane carrying food, medicine arrives in Baghdad

BAGHDAD (R) — A Qatari plane laden with food and medicine for sanctions-hit Iraqi children landed in Baghdad on Saturday and an organizer said the aim was to show that Qataris opposed any military strike on Iraq.

"The Iraqi people are ill-treated and we think what is happening is a conspiracy against the Iraqi people," Mohammad Al Mutawa of the Qatari People's Society for Lifting Sanctions on Iraq, told reporters at a Baghdad airport.

The Qatari aircraft, carrying 16 tonnes of food and medical supplies, flew to Baghdad with the permission of the committee that supervises U.N. sanctions



Iraqis unload a Qatari plane carrying 16 tonnes of medicine and milk for infants donated to the people of Iraq at Baghdad airport, Saturday (AFP photo)

against Iraq.

"We were able to break and penetrate the embargo [on Iraq]," Mr. Mutawa said.

"We came to say to the Iraqi people that the Qatari people are with you," Hassan Rasheed, another Qatari on the plane, said.

Iraq releases 76 Egyptian prisoners

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq freed 76 Egyptian prisoners on Saturday under a general amnesty for Arab prisoners recently ordered by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

"Some 76 Egyptian prisoners were released today, bringing the number to 100 since the president ordered the release of Arabs in Iraqi prisons," a source close to

the Egyptian embassy in Baghdad said. The source gave no further details.

Last week Mr. Hussein ordered the immediate release of all Arab prisoners held in Iraq in a move apparently aimed at winning Arab sympathy in Baghdad's row with the United Nations over weapons inspections.

The move was announced hours after President Hussein met Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Meguid and other international envoys sent to Baghdad to try to find a peaceful solution.

Egypt, along with most Arab countries, has opposed the use of force against Iraq, calling for a diplomatic solution.

PNA demands U.S. protection from Israeli weapons of mass destruction

GAZA CITY (AFP) — The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) on Saturday asked the United States to protect Palestinians from the threat of Israeli chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

Palestinian Health Minister Ryad Zaanun read a statement to journalists demanding U.S. protection, stating that Israel possessed a

"nuclear, chemical and biological arsenal."

"Even in times of peace the Palestinians can be the victims of leaks from [Israeli] nuclear reactors or from chemical and biological stocks," said Mr. Zaanun.

Mr. Zaanun made the comments after meeting a team of U.S. experts sent to advise the PNA how to protect its population should Iraqi biological or chemical weapons strike their areas.

The Centre for Disease Control experts are assessing the resources available to the Palestinians and advising them on how to most effectively deploy them, the U.S. consulate general in Jerusalem said in a news release on Friday.

Palestinians call for Arab summit on Iraq crisis, peace process deadlock

RAMALLAH (AFP) — The Palestinian cabinet has called for an urgent Arab summit to discuss the Iraqi crisis and the prolonged deadlock in the peace process with Israel.

The summit should examine "ways of confronting the dangers confronting the Arab region and the Palestinian people," the cabinet said in a statement issued Saturday after an overnight meeting in Ramallah.

The cabinet called for a "political solution" to the standoff between Iraq and the United Nations over weapons

inspections, saying it should be based on the respect of U.N. resolutions, and rejecting all military options.

It also accused Israel of exploiting pro-Israeli "demonstrations of solidarity" in the Palestinian territories as propaganda against the Palestinians.

Israeli leaders said the rallies were organised with the support of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and showed that the Palestinians had still not truly accepted the notion of peace with the Jewish state.

Meanwhile, Palestinian

President Yasser Arafat is due in Jordan on Sunday for talks with King Hussein, his spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina said.

The meeting follows on from talks between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Washington this week, which the Palestinian cabinet said on Saturday "had failed because of Israeli intransigence."

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said Thursday that the Washington talks failed to achieve any progress despite four separate meetings since Tuesday.

(Continued on page 7)

EU maintains pressure on Iran to revoke Rushdie death sentence

LONDON (AFP) — The European Union Saturday maintained pressure on Iran to revoke the "fatwa" condemning British author Salman Rushdie to death on the ninth anniversary of the death sentence.

The day before, Iran's attorney general, Ayatollah Mortaza Moghtadai, said the "fatwa" is irrevocable and must be carried out.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, speaking as foreign minister of the state holding the presidency of the EU, reiterated the

union's condemnation of the fatwa and called on Iran to enter into a dialogue aimed at withdrawing it.

He said, "The European Union calls upon Iran to abide by international law and urges the Iranian authorities to work with the EU to find a satisfactory solution in respect of Salman Rushdie."

"The European Union welcomes the new Iranian government's stated commitment to respect the rule of law and their emphasis on the need for a dialogue

of civilisations.

"The European Union hopes that this will take us towards the assurances that we need to remove the threat to Salman Rushdie's life."

The British Foreign Office, meanwhile, confirmed that Mr. Cook is to meet Mr. Rushdie for the first time in his official capacity, over the next few days.

Iran's late spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued the fatwa, or religious decree, in 1989, con-

demning Mr. Rushdie to death for blaspheming Islam in his book "The Satanic Verses."

One year ago, an Iranian religious foundation raised the bounty on Mr. Rushdie's head from \$1 million to more than \$2.5 million.

The Iranian government's official line has been that it cannot lift the fatwa but that Iran "will not take any action" against the author, who has been living in hiding in Britain under tight security for the past nine years.

Egypt's top cleric, opposition parties oppose strike on Iraq

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt's top Islamic cleric, Sheikh Mohammad Sayed Tantawi, warned Friday that Muslims would not tolerate a U.S.-British attack on Iraq, Egypt's Middle East New Agency reported.

"I tell the whole world we will not stand idle. We will defend Iraq with our money, lives and all kinds of defence which our Islamic law obliges," Sheikh Tantawi, the grand Sheikh of Al Azhar, told a rally in Cairo.

Hundreds of Egyptians and leaders of several opposition parties attended the meeting at Al Azhar, the leading religious institute for the majority Sunni Muslim sect.

The United States and Britain have threatened to

attack Iraq if it does not give unfettered access to U.N. inspectors seeking to eliminate its weapons of mass destruction.

The leader of a Nasserite party, Diya Eddine Dawood, told the rally that what was planned was no less than an "Israeli-American-British aggression... against Egypt and the whole Arab Nation," MENA reported.

By defending Iraq, "We will be defending ourselves" because the future "aggression" will be against Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and the whole Arab World, Mr. Dawood said.

Egypt, like most Arab countries, has spoken out against a military strike on Iraq and called for a diplo-

matic solution instead.

The vice president of the Liberal Party, Helmy Zein, called on Iraq to comply with U.N. Security Council resolutions in order not to give the "criminals" a chance to attack.

The leader of the Tagammu Party, Khaled Mohyeddine, accused U.S. President Bill Clinton of double standards in that he threatened to attack Iraq while supporting Israel which "possesses weapons of mass destruction."

Israel has refused to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has neither confirmed nor denied reports that it has nuclear weapons.

Mr. Mohyeddine said that Arabs and Muslims did not want such weapons.

Yemeni president leaves Malaysia after visit

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh left Malaysia for Beijing Saturday after a four-day visit, the first by a Yemeni head of state.

"The talks conducted with Malaysian leaders and officials were fruitful and dealt with bilateral and international issues," Mr. Saleh told reporters.

He was accompanied by a 69-member delegation including Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Abdulkarim Al Iryani, Industry Minister Ahmad Sofan and Planning Minister Abdulkader Bajamal.

The two countries signed agreements to ease the exchange of expertise in the oil and gas industry and increase trade, Mr. Saleh said.

Malaysia's national oil company, Petroleum Nasional Bhd. (Petronas), is considering oil and gas exploration in Yemen as the country relaxes existing rules.

Malaysia and Yemen also agreed to encourage private enterprises and organisations to explore trade and investment opportunities. The two countries will grant each other most favoured nation treatment in trade and customs matters.

Malaysia's trade with Yemen came to 147 million ringgit (\$40 million) in the first 11 months of last year compared to 176 million ringgit for the whole of 1996.

The balance was almost entirely in Malaysia's favour. Its main exports were palm oil and timber products.



SYRIANS DEMONSTRATE AGAINST GOLAN ANNEXATION: Syrians shout anti-Israeli slogans during a rally Saturday which marked the 16th anniversary of Israel's decision to annex the Golan Heights. The demonstrators carried Syrian flags and pictures of President Hafez Assad (Reuters photo)

Palestinian court jails Hamas man for shooting

JERICHO (R) — A Palestinian security court on Saturday sentenced a member of Hamas to 10 years in jail with hard labour for his part in the 1996 killing of an Israeli, the prosecutor said.

Amjad Al Henawi, 26, was convicted of taking part in the 1996 West Bank shooting death of David Baum, an American citizen who immigrated to Israel with his family about 12 years ago.

"The state security court has sentenced the prisoner to 10 years in jail for his involvement in the killing," Prosecutor Mohammed Al Bashtawi told Reuters.

Mr. Henawi denied the charges telling reporters at the Jericho Court: "I am not guilty. I didn't do anything."

Baum was killed when gunmen fired at a group of seminary students near the Jewish settlement of Beit

El. Another student was wounded in the attack.

Mr. Henawi's accomplice, Khalili Sbarif, was killed when he was involved in a deadly suicide bombing attack in September in Jerusalem, Israel Radio said.

Hamas vehemently opposes PLO-Israel peace deals.

Since the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was established four years ago, several Islamists

have been sentenced to jail terms or life imprisonment for their involvement in attacks against Israeli targets.

The PNA has stepped up an arrest campaign against Islamists in self-ruled areas after Israeli criticism it was not doing enough to combat "terrorism."

Israel has made a "systematic" PNA crackdown on militants one of its key conditions for progress in the peace process.

Thousands of Yemenis march through Sana'a in support of Iraq

SANA'A (AP) — Led by female students wearing traditional black head scarves and cloaks, some 5,000 demonstrators marched through the city Saturday shouting pro-Iraq and anti-American slogans.

Bystanders abandoned their cars and jumped off buses to join the demonstrators as they headed toward Sana'a University, swelling the original crowd of 1,000 five-fold.

About 150 riot police armed with guns and clubs stood poised by a barricade of 20 jeeps to block the protesters along the route.

Buried by female students, the crowd passed unmolested and stopped past the jeeps shouting "No to America" and "Arabs Revolt." Norms in this conservative nation forbid striking or grabbing women.

The marchers, many carrying Yemeni and Iraqi flags, walked behind a six-metre placard that read "We support Iraq."

Some 1,500 people demonstrated Thursday in Sana'a, also to protest threatened U.S. military action against Iraq to try to force cooperation with U.N. inspectors trying to verify the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Over the past week, pro-Iraq demonstrations have also been organised in Egypt, the Palestinian territories and Jordan.

Yemen has unofficially banned such protests, fearful of the message they may send to the United States and its allies.

During the 1991 Gulf war, Yemen's perceived pro-Iraq tilt during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait cost Yemenis lucrative jobs in the Arab Gulf and led to an estrangement with the United States that took years to ease.

Yemen has been at the forefront of Arab countries calling for the lifting of Iraqi sanctions imposed after the war.

A group of male and female Yemeni writers and intellectu-

als plan to fly to Iraq by Wednesday to deliver food and medicine, the head of the Committee for Solidarity with Muslim and Arab Nations told the Associated Press.

Sadeq Noman said a Yemen Airways flight will transport 25 tonnes of food, milk and medicine. He said his organisation had requested U.N. permission to fly to Baghdad but is still working out the final details.

U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait bar Iraq from exporting oil, its economic mainstay, and ban other trade dealings with Baghdad.

The United Nations has approved several flights delivering humanitarian goods as exceptions to the sanctions.

The sanctions have caused widespread suffering in Iraq, with many of its 22 million people are unable to pay for food and other necessities. Most survive on government rations.

Yassin to seek medical treatment in Egypt

GAZA (R) — The ailing spiritual leader of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, said on Saturday he planned to travel to Egypt next week for medical treatment.

Sheikh Yassin, 61, said he needs surgery to cure a bone infection in the area of his left ear that is spreading towards his brain.

"God willing I will be travelling to Egypt next

Thursday to seek treatment," Sheikh Yassin, who is paralysed, partly sighted and almost deaf, told Reuters. He said he may also travel to Saudi Arabia in the near future to consult doctors there.

Sheikh Yassin said his son Abdul Hamid and top Hamas official Abdul Aziz Al Rantissi will accompany him to Egypt.

"I will be accompanied by two people since Israel rejected my four-member

delegation," he said.

Sheikh Yassin, who said Israel granted him permission to leave Palestinian-ruled Gaza, has said he may try to enter Britain or France for surgery if he doesn't find "adequate treatment" in Egypt or Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Rantissi said they would be met at the Egyptian side of the Israeli-controlled Rafah crossing, linking Gaza and Egypt, by a high-level

Hamas delegation including a medical doctor.

Sheikh Yassin, 61, was freed by Israel last October from a life prison sentence he received in 1989 for founding Hamas and inciting attacks on Israelis.

The Jewish state was forced to pardon him to obtain the release by Jordan of two agents captured in a bungled attempt to kill a senior Hamas official in Amman.

Sudan rebels claim 768 government troops killed since beginning of offensive last month

ADDIS ABABA (R) — The rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) claimed on Saturday it had killed 768 Sudan government soldiers in an offensive from Jan. 29.

The offensive is centred around Wau, the second largest town in southern Sudan.

There was no independent confirmation of the SPLA claims.

SPLA spokesman Yasir Arman told Reuters in Addis Ababa from the Eritrean capital Asmara that the latest offensive was launched on Jan. 29 and the dead included high-ranking officers.

He did not provide SPLA casualty figures.

Mr. Arman said Wau, a key railway link with the rest of the Sudan, was held by both government and SPLA forces.

He said Khartoum troops controlled the airport while the SPLA held a major part of the sub-

urbs.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in fighting in southern Sudan since the SPLA began the civil war in 1983, fighting for autonomy for the mainly black, Christian and animist south from the Arabised, Muslim north.

JORDAN TELEVISION

TEL 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

16:10 ...Cartoon — Pink Panther
16:30 ...French Programmes
18:00 Children's Programme — Skippy
18:30 ...Drama — Broder Town
19:00 ...The Journal
19:15 Doc. — Le Tour de France
19:30 ...News Headlines
19:33 America's Funniest Home Video
20:00 ...Documentary — Killing for a Living
21:10 ...Renegade
22:00 ...News in English
22:30 Best Seller — North and South
23:59 Comedy — "The Upper Hand"

PRAYER TIMES

04:57 ...Fajr
06:15 ...Sunrise Doha
11:50 ...Dhuhr
14:56 ...Asr
17:25 ...Maghreb
18:43 ...Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweiffah, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590
Church of the Annunciation

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TEL 637440

De la Salle Church Tel. 661757

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366

Anglican Church Tel. 652826

Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331

Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 771331

St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751

Armenian International Church Tel. 824328

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 688404

The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932

Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

English-speaking Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Intermittent rains are expected during the day, with cold weather conditions prevailing, skies cloudy and winds westerly moderate to active becoming northeasterly moderate in the evening. In Aqaba,

skies will be partly cloudy, with a chance of scattered showers, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Min/Max temp. ...06/12

Aqaba ...10/22

Deserts ...04/14

Jordan Valley ...10/20

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 11, Aqaba 21 Humidity readings: Amman 89 per cent, Aqaba 50 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Walid Al Masri ...675485

Dr. Yousef Rashid ...875792

Dr. Jum'a Abu Dhiab ...758848

Dr. Khalil Jbali ...740740

Firas pharmacy ...661912

Ferdows pharmacy ...778336

Al Asema pharmacy ...637055

Nafroukh pharmacy ...623672

Al Salam pharmacy ...636730

Yacoub pharmacy ...644945

Shmeisani pharmacy ...637660

Najib pharmacy ...847632

IRBID:

Dr. Mazen Abu Bakir ...278770

Al Quds pharmacy ...566111

ZARQA:

Dr. Walid Halaseh ...982799

Khalifeh pharmacy ...98541

Food Control Centre ...637111

Civil Defence Department ...566111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue ...630341

Rescue Police ...192, 621111, 637777

Fire Brigade ...617101

Blood Bank ...775121

Highway Police ...843402

Traffic Police ...896390

Public Security Dept. ...630321

Hotel Complaints ...5605800

Price Complaints ...5661176

Water & Sewage Complaints ...897467

Amman Municipality Complaints ...787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) ...121

Overseas Calls ...010230

Central Amman Telephone Repairs ...623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs ...5661101

Jordan Television ...773111

Radio Jordan ...774111

Water Authority ...5680100

J. Electricity Authority ...815615

Electric Power Co. ...636381

RJ Flight Information ...44-53200

Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

(02)275555

Greek Catholic Hospital

(02)272275

Ibn Al Nafees Hospital

(02)247100

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

Husseini Medical Centre ...813813/32

Khalidi Maternity ...644281/6

Akileh Maternity ...642441/2

Jabal Amman Maternity ...642362

Malhas, J. Amman ...636140

Palestine, Shmeisani ...5607071

Shmeisani Hospital ...5669131

University Hospital ...845845

Al-Muasher Hospital ...566727/9

The Islamic, Abdali ...5666126/37

Al-Ahli, Abdali ...5664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhajreen ...777101/3

Al-Bashir ...775111/25

Army, Marka ...891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital ...5602240/50

Amal Hospital ...5674155

The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery ...865199

(02)275555

Greek Catholic Hospital

(02)272275

Ibn Al Nafees Hospital

(02)247100

HOSPITALS

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Husseini Medical Centre ...813813/32

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Queen Alia Hospital ...5602240/50

Amal Hospital ...5674155

The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery ...865199

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44) 53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone (44) (52700)

17:00 ...Brussels, Geneva (RJ)

17:05 ...Paris (RJ)

17:45 ...London (RJ)

18:25 ...Madrid, Milan (RJ)

18:30 ...Athens (RJ)

18:50 ...Jeddah (RJ)

19:40 ...Rome (RJ)

20:25 ...Frankfurt, Vienna (RJ)

23:20 ...Vienna, Aqaba (RJ)

00:05 ...Cairo (RJ)

Other Flights

03:25 ...Rome (AZ)

10:00 ...Sanaa (YY)

12:25 ...Bahrain (GF)

13:00 ...Moscow (SU)

15:00 ...Doha (QR)

17:45 ...Jeddah (SV)

20:00 ...Tel Aviv (LY)

20:40 ...Cairo (MS)

23:10 ...Istanbul (TK)

Royal Wings (RW)

07:45 ...Aqaba (RW)

09:05 ...Amman (QAIA) (RW)

09:50 Amman(Marka Airport) (RW)

17:20 ...Tel Aviv (RW)

18:30 ...Amman (QAIA) (RW)

21:20 ...Aqaba (RW)

22:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)

10:40 ...Graz (Austria) (add) (RJ)

10:50 ...Aqaba, Vienna (RJ)

11:15 ...Rome (RJ)

11:30 ...Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)

12:00 ...Aqaba, London (RJ)

12:00 ...Lamaca, Athens (RJ)

20:10 ...Cairo (RJ)

20:15 ...New Delhi (RJ)

20:50 ...Jeddah (RJ)

21:00 ...Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)

22:10 ...Damascus (RJ)

22:30 ...Bangkok (RJ)

22:45 ...Sanaa (RJ)

23:00 ...Kuala Lumpur (RJ)

Other Flights

03:00 ...Athens (OA)

04:20 ...Rome (AZ)

06:40 ...Beirut, London (BA)

07:50 ...London (BA)

11:00 ...Sanaa (YY)

13:15 ...Doha (GF)

Queen attends fund-raising concert for SOS villages

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor Saturday attended a fund-raising concert for the SOS Villages Association at the Royal Cultural Centre, according to a press release.

The SOS Children's Villages Association — to whom all proceeds will be donated — organised the concert in cooperation with the French Cultural Centre.

According to the SOS Children's Villages Association, of which Queen Noor is honorary president, "due

to the increase in the number of children under its care, the association is holding numerous cultural fund-raising programmes." The SOS Villages currently care for 111 children in Amman and 72 children in Aqaba, in addition to teenagers living at the SOS Youth Houses.

Mr. Giusiano received international acclaim at the 1995 Warsaw Chopin Competition, where he became the youngest pianist to win first prize. He produced a CD on Frederic Chopin,

whose work has inspired him since he was a child, and dedicated his performance in Amman in January 1997 to the music of Chopin.

At the SOS concert, Mr. Giusiano broadened his repertoire to include works by Maurice Ravel and Sergei Rachmaninoff. His flawless technique has been described by the French Association for Artistic Action as "an art marked by an uncompromising clarity."

King meets with visiting Iranian delegation

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein Saturday voiced pride in Jordanian-Iranian relations and stressed the Kingdom's interest in further developing them in all fields for the best interests of the people in both countries.

The King was speaking during an audience at the Royal Court with a visiting Iranian parliamentary delegation representing the Iranian-Jordanian Friendship Society at the Islamic Shura (Consultative) Council.

Earlier Saturday, Lower House of Parliament Speaker Sa'd Hayel Srour met with the Iranian delegation and voiced the Lower House's support for

their efforts to establish an Islamic parliamentary union, similar to other regional parliamentary unions.

Mr. Srour called on parliamentary, intellectual and cultural organisations in the Islamic World to join efforts spearheaded by Jordan to defend the image of Islam against any attempts to distort it and link it with terrorism.

Mr. Srour said the latest visit by HRH Crown Prince Hassan and his chairing of Jordan's delegation to the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting reflected the joint desire to strengthen Jordanian-Iranian cooperation and coordination.

Mr. Srour praised Iran's contribution to strengthening common Islamic work, noting that the Jordanian and Iranian parliaments can mobilise political will at the highest levels in both countries to build stronger and better institutional relations.

Regarding the current crisis between Iraq and the United Nations, Mr. Srour reiterated Jordan's position rejecting the use of military force against Iraq and calling for a peaceful solution to the crisis in order to spare Iraq and the entire region from further suffering and tragedies.

Underlining the importance of joint Islamic efforts in defusing the cur-

rent crisis, Mr. Srour said the recent contact between Prince Hassan and Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, in his capacity as the present chairman of the OIC, is aimed at ensuring a peaceful solution to the current crisis and averting any military strike against Iraq.

For his part, Jaseem Jadiri, the head of the Iranian delegation, voiced his country's rejection of any military action against Iraq and stressed the importance of dialogue in ending the crisis and the need to comply with international legitimacy resolutions.

Also Saturday, Abdullah Jazi, chairman of the Lower House's Arab and

International Affairs Committee, met with the Iranian delegation and reviewed cooperation in various fields.

Dr. Jazi underlined the important role Iran can play in addressing issues and concerns of the Islamic Nation in its capacity as the current holder of the OIC presidency. He praised Iran's gesture of releasing two Jordanian captives in response to a request by Prince Hassan during his visit to Tehran late last year.

The Iranian delegation arrived here today on a several-day official visit in response to an official invitation extended to them by Mr. Srour.

JTC officials complain of large amount spent on 'friendship' lines

By Munther Murjan
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Hundreds of Jordanians, especially teenagers, are squandering family funds by making "hotline" chats with unknown parties worldwide, officials said Saturday.

Jordan Telecommunication Company (JTC) Board of Directors Chairman Walid Dweik told the Jordan Times that citizens were spending around JD3.5 million a year on the so-called "friendship" chats and warned of increasing telephone abuse.

Many international companies have been placing ads in foreign newspapers and on the satellite television stations telling "lonely citizens" worldwide to fill their emotional void by calling special telephone numbers.

"This phenomenon actually started at the end of 1994," Mr. Dweik said. "We had complaints over some bills

which some people received from JTC asking them to pay for calls made to a destination that was completely unknown to them."

"People came to our offices with bills for phone calls made to islands located in the Caribbean Sea," Mr. Dweik recalled.

Most companies offering hotlines are based in Western Europe, the U.S. and Canada. Some of the ads placed by them say: "If you are lonely and need a friend just call the following number (.....) or 'For friendship, romance, love and marriage, just call (.....)'."

"These companies make lots of money from what can be described by some as senseless expensive chats via satellite," Mr. Dweik added.

The telephone charges per minute of a "hotline" call to a company based in the United States is the same as the fee levied from normal phone calls.

"The JTC's annual revenues from international calls total between JD60 million to 70 million," he said. "The so-called 'friendship lines' make almost five per cent of that amount every year."

He said the JTC was planning to study the implications of such calls on the youth and on society.

"I believe that these lines affect the fabric that holds the family together since most of these chats may not be more than sex chats or empty and senseless talk," Mr. Dweik said.

He said JTC had no legal means to prevent Jordanians from calling "hotlines" because such Western companies are legal.

"The only way [to prevent the calls] is to disconnect the whole route leading to a country from where a particular 'friendship line' originates, and this would be bad for JTC operations."

Ministry allows women principals at male schools

By Hind-Lara Mango
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Ministry of Education has recently given the green light to its 21 directorates to appoint female principals at public male schools.

"We have a deficiency in the number and quality of male teachers and principals. This profession is not as popular with males as it is with females," said Minister of Education and Higher Education Munther Masri.

Ministry statistics indicate that over 60 per cent of the ministry's staff, including teachers, are women.

In a recent interview with the Jordan Times, Dr. Masri said qualified male teachers find jobs abroad or leave the profession.

There have been mixed reactions to the ministry's latest move. Staff at the ministry have responded positively to the idea, while others, outside the ministry, have had reservations.

Dr. Masri said the move was not prompted by social or cultural factors, but rather by a noticeable need for qualified principals.

"We are not making a swap here, but are concerned about the current standard of education at our male schools," Dr. Masri said. The minister added that some have had fears that this move would increase incidents of violence at schools and promote co-education.

The minister said he believed that female principals would have a positive impact on male schools in terms of controlling incidents of school violence and discipline.

There are one million students attending government schools in the Kingdom and even though female teachers already teach at male schools, they are only assigned to the primary departments.

"Co-education already exists at our schools and it is not limited to private schools," the minister said.

Court reduces life sentence of man convicted of killing police officer

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Criminal Court has reduced the sentence against a 28-year-old man convicted in November 1997 of killing a police officer from life in prison to 15 years.

Attallah Saleh was declared guilty by the court tribunal on Nov. 8 of killing Captain Yousef Daradkeh, 30, of the Mafraq Police Department in the Hussein suburb on May 12, 1997.

The court convicted Mr. Saleh of manslaughter and sentenced him to life in prison, instead of the usual maximum of 15 years for manslaughter, because "he killed an on-duty police officer."

Court transcripts from the trial said Capt. Daradkeh, who was in civil uniform, went along with a police force to the defendant's rented house at around midnight on May 12 after receiving a tip that Mr. Saleh and 11 others were smuggling drugs and arms

from Syria.

Capt. Daradkeh reportedly called on the defendant to surrender. Instead, Mr. Saleh, who was sleeping at the time, woke up and fled the scene, and "when the victim ordered him to stop, the defendant turned around and shot him in the chest, killing him instantly."

But on November 29, the Court of Cassation returned the case to the Criminal Court for a retrial, stating in its ruling that "when Capt. Daradkeh went to

search the defendant's house, he was not carrying a search warrant."

"Since Capt. Daradkeh did not obtain a search warrant, he should be considered as a regular citizen, without regard to his police rank," the court then ruled.

On Thursday, the Criminal Court decided to reduce Mr. Saleh's life sentence to 15-years with hard labour.

Thursday's verdict was handed down by Judges Abdul Hamid Sa'ed, Yassin Abdullah and Ahmad Khatib.

Human rights group urges Parliament to ensure freedom of expression, reduce press limitations

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A U.S.-based human rights group Saturday urged Parliament to ensure total freedom of expression for newspapers and other published materials and reduce limitations on the press in accordance with international human rights laws.

In a statement made available to the Jordan Times, Human Rights Watch asked the 80-member Lower House, in its upcoming debates, to consider limiting restrictive legislation endangering freedom of expression.

The organisation also asked that any new regulatory press law allow the circulation of all kinds of information and opinions, including those of a political nature.

Human Rights Watch advised the Lower House to remove all imposed restrictive regulations and bans on news items as well as articles, analyses and pictures by ensuring the law is unbiased or does not contain unreasonable or unexplainable restrictions.

In its statement, the organisation criticised the "hastily" passed amendments to the 1993 press law, issued last May while Parliament was in recess, saying the government should not have overridden the legislative authority by issuing a law described as stifling freedom of expression and reflecting poorly on the press and Jordanians alike.

"Even though we take

into consideration local interests and security concerns, we think that the amendments... passed extremely restrictive amendments," the statement said, adding that prohibiting the publishing of articles and information concerning heads of state or security issues unless approved by the government is "inexcusable."

The amendments, opposed by political parties and unions, and described by the organisation as putting freedom of expression "under siege," had introduced prohibitive capital requirements for both dailies and weeklies, increased the list of topics that could not be covered, and stipulated harsh penalties for violations of the law.

"Publishers and editors

alike should enjoy the right of providing a variety of news and ideas without having to face censorship, legal actions, fines and licence revocation," the statement said.

The organisation hailed the High Court's decision on January 26 that annulled the revisions for being "unconstitutional" since there was no state of emergency or necessitating circumstances for the government to change the previous law.

"We had called on the government after the closure of several weeklies to allow their publication and demanded that all restrictions by the government be defined in a proper way that would ensure the right to freedom of expression," the statement said.

Survivors, officials working to raise cancer awareness despite social stigma

By Ahmed Naser
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Maha N. Kalaji said she did not panic when she first felt the lump in her breast that she thought might be a cancer tumour, although the doctor and nurse who diagnosed it did.

"The nurse kept coming up to me and asking me to stop crying, which I was not," she said, adding that "when the doctor finally decided to tell me that I had cancer, he himself started crying."

Jordanian society's fear of cancer has created a social stigma concerning discussion of the potentially fatal disease, said Ms. Kalaji, 36, whose father and mother fell victim to the malignant affliction.

"Most people in Jordan fear cancer to a degree that they do not dare open it as a subject for discussion," she told participants of a weekly debate held at Books@Cafe, which has tackled many controversial subjects every Friday for the last five months.

Ms. Kalaji said that at the time, in April 1993, she had to seek costly medical aid abroad since there were no cancer treatment centres in Jordan. Between diagnosis and treatment, Ms. Kalaji spent eight months at a treatment centre in the United States.

Although there are now cancer treatment centres in

the Kingdom, people are still apprehensive about discussing the subject. Such fears are impeding registration in programmes like that offered by Al Amal Cancer Centre, said Dena Raad, Al Amal public relations manager.

According to Ms. Raad, people live in a constant state of denial regarding cancer, as seen when people tell her "la tufawili," meaning "don't be pessimistic," when she approaches them to register in Al Amal's Health Care programme.

Without prejudice to nationality and for a minimum of JD10, anyone free of cancer can enjoy the benefits of Al Amal's Health Care programme.

Ms. Raad pointed out that cancer prevention is much cheaper than treating it — expenses for cancer treatment can reach tens of thousands of dinars.

"Unfortunately, people are learning the hard way that they too can be hit by cancer," stressed Ms. Raad, adding that the majority of the 20,000 registered beneficiaries of Al Amal Centre's Health Programme have had one or more of their relatives die or become sick from cancer.

"This is a relatively low figure in comparison to the Kingdom's population of around 4.5 million," said Ms. Raad, noting that this number resulted from low awareness

regarding the dangers of cancer.

Al Amal recently concluded a three-month, free examination programme, which also witnessed low participation. Only 500 citizens took advantage of the free service.

Al Amal Centre, established in 1984 by the General Union of Voluntary Societies, aims at getting one million registered beneficiaries to its health care programme.

As a non-governmental organisation, Al Amal must find its own funding. Therefore, the bulk of the centre's income goes to medical treatment and equipment, leaving only a small sum for cancer awareness campaigns.

At present, the only effective cancer awareness method available to Al Amal Centre is personal accounts by cancer survivors, added Ms. Raad.

"If people realise that someone sitting two chairs away from them went through a near death experience... that may trigger them into thinking that this too can affect me," she said.

From this, the centre is adopting a two-prong approach by conducting events that generate awareness and income. The next scheduled events are two concerts by piano player Danny Beal that will be held Feb. 16 and 17 at Books@Cafe. Proceeds will go directly to needy cancer patients being treated at Al Amal.

Opposition calls for investigation of police action at Al Hussein Mosque

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The opposition Saturday reacted angrily to police handling of a rally Friday in support of the government to investigate the incident or resign.

"What happened on Friday was a violation of the sanctity of the mosques," said Suleiman Arar, head of Al Musaqbal (future) Party, in a joint press conference with other opposition parties and professional union leaders.

"Police dogs were pushed inside the mosque... this indicates that the government has not become a representative of the people but a tool to implement American and Jewish dictates," Mr. Arar, a former minister of interior and speaker of the Lower House, said.

Mr. Arar was referring to a pro-Iraq rally, organised by the opposition, where riot police, armed with tear gas, guns, dogs, and batons, forcefully dispersed thousands of worshippers following prayers at the Al Hussein Mosque in downtown Amman.

Many people were beaten by police, resulting in several hospitalisations,

and more than 50 were detained but later released, the opposition said.

"We call for an investigation and that those who gave orders and led the attack against the participants [in the rally] be tried," added Mr. Arar, who himself was beaten by police.

"We also call for dismissing this 'military' government which has forgotten the basic human rights of its people," added Mr. Arar.

"Throughout my career as an interior minister, I knew that the work of police was not to beat people but to stop any harm that might come their way," Mr. Arar said.

He said the opposition parties have authorised former judge Najib Rashdan to sue the government over its actions.

Jordan Engineers Association President Leith Shbeilat also joined Mr. Arar in calling on the government to step down.

"We call for the formation of a national government that represents the aspirations of the Jordanian people," said Mr. Shbeilat, a pro-Iraq independent politician who recently visited Baghdad and met with Iraqi Presi-

dent Saddam Hussein.

"We want a government that represents the people and not the U.S. or the Zionists. We do not want a government that plans with the [U.S.] to attack Iraq and give it installations and facilities on Jordanian soil," claimed Mr. Shbeilat.

Meanwhile, the government Saturday said the police action was a reaction to the demonstrators' decision to challenge a ban on rallies issued last week.

"Those who took part in the rally believed that was the only way to express support for Iraq. The government sees many forms and ways to show support for Iraq," Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi told reporters following the weekly Cabinet session.

"The prime minister outlined the various diplomatic efforts the government has undertaken to show support for the Iraqi people and to defuse the crisis," said the minister, referring to the Thursday meeting between Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and opposition leaders, during which Dr. Majali informed the opposition that his government would not allow the rally.

Also Saturday, the Muslim Brotherhood criticised the police action and called for an inquiry to determine who was behind the decision to storm the mosque.

"For the first time in Jordan's history, and during the tenure of your government, a violation of the sanctity of God's house took place," the movement's spiritual leader, Abdul Majeed Thneibat, said in a letter addressed to Dr. Majali.

"Such acts are not permitted either by the constitution or by the law," the one-page letter said.

"Police could have avoided the unjustified confrontation as long as the citizens had stopped the rally and did not leave the mosque," Mr. Thneibat said in his message.

"What happened is alien to us and it deepens the martial law mentality under the banner of democracy," said the letter, a copy of which was made available to the Jordan Times.

"We call for a judicial committee to investigate this case and punish those who were responsible," added Mr. Thneibat.

what's going on

CONCERTS

Musical concert by the Austrian Unicorn Ensemble at Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

Performance by Danny Beal (a benefactor for cancer patients in need) at the Books @ Cafe on Monday and Tuesday Feb. 16, 17 at 6:30 p.m. (for details call 849387, 5326440).

FILMS

"Le rayon vert" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh on Monday Feb. 16, at 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

Cuban film "Lucia" (in Spanish with subtitles in English) at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman at 5:00 p.m.

Film (in English) on studying at German universities (parts III and IV) at Goethe-Institut, Jabal Amman, at 4:30

PLAY

* Children's play "A Theatre Dream" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 10:00 a.m. (daily until Feb. 21).

EXHIBITIONS

* Paintings by Sudanese artist Salah Al Murr at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 23.

* Private collection of Mamdouh Bisharat entitled "A Vision, An Identity" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh, until March 5 (Tel. 643251). Also displaying works by contemporary Arab artists — "The New Collection."

* "History of Cartoon Drawings" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh, until Feb. 26.

* Works by about a hundred artists from Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon and Jordan at Hammurabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 20 (Tel. 5336098).

Looting and some fighting go on in Sierra Leone capital

FREETOWN (R) — Nigerian-led peacekeepers who ousted Sierra Leone's army junta have brought most parts of Freetown under their control but residents of the capital said Saturday they could still hear small-scale fighting in some areas.

"There are still pockets of fighting, but we don't know where it is taking place," said Martha Carey of Medical Charity Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

MSF workers managed to get to the Connaught hospital in the centre of Freetown Friday and saw widespread looting on their way into the centre from the west of town, she said.

Other witnesses reported widespread killings in the capital Friday, with suspected collaborators of the junta as the main target. The situation in the rest of the country was unclear.

The ECOMOG peacekeepers said earlier they controlled most of Freetown.

"ECOMOG forces are occupying about 90 per cent of the town and there are now mopping-up opera-

tions going on," its commander, General Timothy Sheldip, told BBC radio.

The 16-nation regional West African bloc ECOWAS mandated ECOMOG to reinstate President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, ousted in a military coup in May 1997.

There was still no news as to the whereabouts of junta leader Johnny Paul Koroma.

Twenty-five of his fleeing officials were seized in Liberia Friday when two helicopters carrying them were intercepted and forced to land in Monrovia by a Nigerian warplane.

There was some hope for an estimated 500,000 starving civilians trapped by the fighting. The World Food Programme (WFP) said it was loading a ship in Liberia with 580 tonnes of food which should land in Freetown by Wednesday.

"We cannot wait any longer to bring urgently needed food aid to hundreds of thousands of desperately hungry people in Freetown," WFP Regional Manager Paul Ares said in a statement.

Nigeria, the regional

power whose troops dominate the ECOMOG force, implicitly gave its go-ahead for relief shipments. Such aid has been blocked until now by a regional embargo.

Nigerian Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi said in a statement that the overthrow of the military junta had been achieved with minimum loss of life.

"Now that ECOMOG has control of most parts of the country, we call upon all friends of Sierra Leone to assist in the urgent task of bringing humanitarian relief to the people of Sierra Leone," Mr. Ikimi said.

The United Nations Friday appealed to all parties in Sierra Leone to allow relief workers to use land, air and sea routes in order to help the civilian population.

Security council members, according to its president Denis Dague Rewaka of Gabon, called for "full unrestricted access" for people in need and the safety and security of all humanitarian personnel.

Food stocks in Freetown were either depleted or

looted and U.N. officials said a major catastrophe was in the making.

The council also called on the Nigerian-led troops in Sierra Leone to cooperate with U.N. officials in the country.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan, according to his spokesman Fred Eckhard, "considered it regrettable that things turned violent and that the civilian population, as usual, is suffering the consequences."

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, the chairman of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), praised the Nigerian-led initiative.

"We want to say well done to them," Mr. Mugabe told reporters, addressing his compliments to the ECOMOG troops.

He said the OAU would ensure that Mr. Kabbah, who is exiled in Guinea, returned to power.

Gen. Sheldip said ECOMOG would bring back Mr. Kabbah "as soon as we are able to create a safe haven in Freetown", adding he wanted this to happen "as quickly as possible".



A Sierra Leonean man carries his daughter onto shore upon arrival in the Guinean capital after a 12 hour boat journey from the embattled capital of Freetown (Reuters photo)

At least 50 dead in bus explosion in Chinese city

BEIJING (AFP) — At least 50 people were killed Saturday in an explosion on a bus in Wuhan city in the central Chinese province of Hubei, witnesses said.

Police, contacted by telephone from Beijing confirmed the blast but said they had no figures on the number of deaths. The blast rocked the bus around 10:00 a.m. (0200 GMT), engulfing it in flames, damaging nearby vehicles and apartments and injuring several passengers, witnesses contacted in Hanyang district said.

Hanyang is one of the three former independent cities which constitutes Wuhan, China's fifth largest city with a population of four million. Four or five of the passengers escaped from the inferno, but were covered in flames, the witnesses

added.

One witness who called AFP but refused to identify himself said the bomb had exploded on the number one bus route as it entered the district.

"You could see blood and pieces of flesh everywhere," he said.

Everything within a 30- to 40-metre radius suffered damage, with two taxis and three other public buses affected.

Another witness said the explosion was very strong and that nearby vehicles were overturned by the force of the blast.

The road was also closed until late afternoon. Police in Wuhan refused to discuss the cause of the blast, but said the city's police force was mobilised and on alert.

Hospitals contacted in Hanyang district, which is near the main bridge crossing the Yangtze

River, refused to reveal numbers of either dead or injured.

Frequent reports reach Beijing of explosions on public transport caused by passengers carrying large amounts of dangerous materials in their luggage.

News of the blast came as a Hong Kong newspaper reported that Beijing police had detained more than 10 suspected "terrorists" and seized explosives believed to have been brought from the predominantly-Muslim region of Xinjiang.

The group had apparently been planning a bombing campaign in the capital.

In March last year, a bomb exploded on a bus in central Beijing wounding 10, according to the official toll. A second bomb exploded outside a major shopping centre but caused no casualties.

Two Bosnian Serb war crimes suspects said ready to surrender

BOSANSKI SAMAC. Bosnia-Herzegovina (AFP) — Two Bosnian Serb war crimes suspects prepared to surrender Saturday in this northern town of the Republika Srpska, according to corroborating sources.

Miroslav Tadic, known as Miro Brko, said in a telephone interview with AFP Friday that he would surrender to the Bosnian Serb police in the presence of U.S. diplomats and his lawyers.

Mr. Tadic, 60, suggested that at least two suspects were ready to turn themselves in, although he refused to give further details.

"We do not feel guilty at all," he said. According to sources close to Mr. Tadic, another Bosnian Serb suspected of war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Milan Simic, living in Bosanski Samac, was believed ready to surrender with Mr. Tadic.

"The two men will surrender to the local authorities of the Republika Srpska and will be transferred to

the U.S. base of the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Tuzla, from which they will most probably be taken to The Hague," the source said.

The SFOR commander, U.S. General Eric Shinseki, participated in the organisation of their surrender, the source, who did not wish to be identified, added.

"Tadic considers that he has committed no crime and he wants to surrender because he is tired of hiding and living in fear of being arrested," the source said.

The two men are part of a group of six Serbs indicted in June 1995 by the ICTY for "the arrest and detention of Bosnian Croats and Muslims" in the Bosanski Samac region where they were said to have set up camps where prisoners were "killed, beaten, tortured, sexually and otherwise mistreated."

The six are also accused of "forcing Croats and Muslims to abandon their homes and authorising Serbs to enter the vacant houses," and of terrorising the non-Serb population into leaving the region. The pre-war Croat and Muslim

population of Bosanski Samac was 17,000 people out of a total of 33,000.

The four other suspects are Slobodan Miljkovic, Blagoje Simic, Stevan Todorovic and Simo Zaric.

Mr. Tadic, a former school teacher, ran a cafe in the town at the time the conflict erupted in April 1992. He was named president of the committee dealing with the exchange of prisoners.

He has been charged with "crimes against humanity" and "serious violations" of the 1949 Geneva convention. The U.N. court accuses him of "participating in the planning and preparation of the illegal deportation and forced transfer of hundreds of Muslims and Croats, including women, children and elderly people" from Bosanski Samac.

Mr. Simic, a 39-year-old economist, became chief executive of the town at the start of the war, and is accused of having beaten a Muslim with a metal bar in June 1992.

According to local sources, Mr. Simic was severely injured in a mine explosion in 1993.

Kohl ally slaps down talk of changing horses

BONN (R) — Chancellor Helmut Kohl's allies moved quickly Saturday to slap down speculation that the 67-year-old German leader could yet abandon his bid to win a record fifth term at this year's general election.

Peter Hintze, secretary general of the Christian Democrats (CDU), told German radio that coalition conservatives were in "closed formation" behind Mr. Kohl.

Mr. Hintze's remarks followed an interview given by Michael Glos, parliamentary leader of the CDU's Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU), which appeared to leave open a possible "change of horses" ahead of the Sept. 27 vote.

"I cannot imagine winning a race in which one changes horses in the home straight. A big party can never be protected, however, from the foolishness of individuals," Mr. Glos told Spiegel magazine in an interview released before publication Monday.

"If the horses fail, then we would have to make a last effort to win the race. But I cannot see this situation."

Mr. Glos also made disparaging remarks about junior coalition partners the Free Democrats (FDP) — allies Mr. Kohl is banking on to win reelection to parliament to keep his existing three-way alliance in power.

Polls show the FDP struggling to clear the five per cent hurdle needed to win seats in parliament under Germany's electoral system of proportional representation.

Mr. Glos is politically close to CDU/CSU parliamentary leader Wolfgang Schäuble, who has been touted as leader of a possible "grand coalition" between the Christian Democrats and the opposition Social Democrats (SPD).

Latest opinion polls put a possible "Red-Green" alliance of the opposition SPD and environmentalist greens on course to win a majority in the Bundestag Lower House of Parliament.

World's second largest Muslim congregation begins near Dhaka

TONGI, Bangladesh (AFP) — Tens of thousands of Muslims from home and abroad poured in here Saturday at the start of an annual religious congregation, Islam's second largest gathering after the Hajj pilgrimage.

The three-day mass congregation, or Biswa Ijtema, was flagged off early Saturday in this northern suburban town amid mass prayers, Islamic sermons and hymns as thousands of devotees from far-away districts and several foreign countries continued to arrive.

Organisers, quoted by newspapers, said they expected up to two million Muslims, including thousands from some 80 neighbouring, Western and other countries, to converge on the river bank site before the event draws to a close Monday with final mass prayers.

The congregation is an annual event organised by the World Tablig Jamaat

and has taken place in this town for the past 31 years, the official BSS news agency said.

The Jamaat, which was launched nearly four decades ago in India as a religious movement to encourage Muslims to rigorously follow and practise the Islamic tenants in day to day life, was shifted to Bangladesh, formerly an eastern province of Pakistan, in 1967.

The Independent newspaper said this year's congregation was expected to choose a new Ameer of the Tablig to succeed Hazrat Moulana Enamul Hasan who died a few months ago.

Thousands of Muslims, including Burkha clad women, from across Bangladesh and other countries had thronged to the congregation site Friday.

Local municipal authorities, government public health officials and a small unit from the nearby military garrison were at work to assist Tablig volunteers in

providing sanitation, medical care and building makeshift shelters on 160 acres of open ground on the Turag River, some 20 kilometres from Dhaka.

The state-run Bangladesh Railway said it was operating several special additional trains from Dhaka daily to ferry thousands of devotees to Tongi to join the congregation. State-run and private buses as well as motorised launches and country boats are also providing extra trips to meet growing demands.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed Friday greeted the participants for the meeting. She, along with high-ranking government officials, are expected to participate in Monday's final mass.

The main opposition leader and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, now in Saudi Arabia for a Umra and medical checkup, also sent a message wishing the congregation success, her aides here said.



Muslim devotees, attending a three-day religious rites festival, wash their hands in the river Turag, near Dhaka, before joining a prayer (Reuters photo)

Bad weather hampers Afghan quake relief efforts

ROSTAQ, Afghanistan (AFP) — Fog, rain and mud-caked roads were still hampering relief efforts in this region of northern Afghanistan Saturday as temperatures dropped below freezing more than a week after an earthquake flattened villages and left some 4,500 dead.

"Again we are battling against the elements and the shattered infrastructure but we have to make do with what supplies we have," said Alex Faite, coordinator for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) operation here.

"The weather means that supplies cannot come in by air, but we are hoping that some convoys carrying essential supplies will arrive today."

Aid workers expressed concern about coping with an exodus from the quake-hit area towards Rostaq. The town is already sheltering some 6,000 people from surrounding villages after the 5.6 Richter scale earthquake struck on Feb. 4.

Hundreds were trekking on foot or on donkeys towards the town in Takhar province, some facing a four or six-hour walk. Those who have already arrived are being housed in schools and military garrisons.

Many of the buildings have no windows and the refugees are struggling to keep warm, aid workers said.

With most villages unreachable due to a lack of four-wheel-drive vehicles, aid agencies were concentrating on distributing aid in and around the town. A U.N. truck arrived overnight carrying plastic sheeting for emergency shelters and a convoy of trucks from the French agency ACTED arrived with coal.

Fog and low cloud was delaying efforts to use helicopters to assess damage in many villages believed hit by the quake. So far only eight out of 27 settlements feared damaged had been surveyed, all by road.

The United Nations' World Food Programme appealed Friday for more assistance, saying 30,000 Afghans were "in desperate need" of emergency help, as its first aid convoy carrying 20 tonnes of food reached the area.

The ICRC launched an appeal Friday for 5.6 million Swiss francs (about \$3.8 million) to help victims.

The United Nations and ICRC had hoped to begin Friday the air drop of 1,000 tonnes of supplies into Rostaq until they were thwarted by the weather.

Emergency teams on the ground said their greatest concerns were the cold, the threat from communicable diseases and dwindling food supplies, warning that more people could die.

A U.N. official in the Pakistani capital Islamabad said Friday aircraft were desperately needed to parachute relief to remote inaccessible mountain hamlets.

"The appalling weather and the low visibility make an air drop impossible but it will still be an option for the next few days if the weather improves," Red Cross Federation spokesman Jaile Thorgersen said Friday.

A moderate earthquake with its epicentre near Takhar province was recorded in Islamabad Saturday, seismological monitors said.

The early morning tremors were felt in various places in northwest Pakistan but there were no immediate reports of damage. The earthquake, which recorded 5.5 on the Richter scale, occurred at 0018 GMT, some 250 kilometres north of Islamabad.

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An Indonesian teenager walks his bicycle past a pile of smoldering ashes as others clear the street in the town of Losari in Central Java after residents rioted and looted shops on Feb. 13 (Reuters photo)

Clinton scandal widens with new testimonies

WASHINGTON (AFP) — In the latest twist in a headline-grabbing sex and perjury scandal, a retired White House security agent was cleared to testify about an alleged affair between the president and a former intern.



Retired Secret Service officer Lewis Fox leaves U.S. District Court, where a grand jury is investigating the White House sex scandal (Reuters photo)

In a deal made with special counsel Kenneth Starr, who is probing whether President Bill Clinton tried to cover up an alleged affair with former intern Monica Lewinsky, the justice and treasury departments will decline to block testimony by former Secret Service officer Lewis Fox, according to a statement.

Meanwhile a California friend of Ms. Lewinsky told Mr. Starr's investigators that Ms. Lewinsky told her of a long-term sexual relationship she was carrying out with Mr. Clinton.

Times quoted sources as saying she told investigators that Ms. Lewinsky had spoken to her of a sexual relationship between her and the president that went on for more than a year.

Mr. Clinton's current headaches are based on his sworn testimony denying the Lewinsky affair in a sexual harassment suit dating back to the 1980s — when Mr. Clinton was governor of Arkansas — brought by Paula Jones.

The key person who brought the alleged Lewinsky affair to the Jones attorney was Linda Tripp, a Lewinsky co-worker.

Ms. Tripp secretly recorded telephone conversations in which Ms. Lewinsky allegedly claimed to have had a sexual affair with Mr. Clinton — then gave the information to attorneys for Ms. Jones the night before Mr. Clinton's deposition in her sexual harassment suit, Washington Post reported Saturday.

The information provided by Ms. Tripp allowed the Jones lawyers to ask Mr. Clinton tough and detailed questions — such as questions about alleged gifts to Ms. Lewinsky — that may eventually lead the president to contradict himself and upon himself to perjure charges, said the Post.

Mr. Clinton not only denied under oath that he did not have a sexual relationship with Ms. Lewinsky when he met Mrs. Jones' lawyers on Jan. 17, but also that he did not recall being with her alone for any length of time, sources familiar with the meeting told the Post.

Space shuttle Columbia launch delayed

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida (AFP) — The space shuttle Columbia's next mission has been postponed for two weeks, NASA reported.

Columbia will now be launched on April 16 and not on April 2 as originally planned, NASA spokesman George Diller said.

Fire at small Rome hotel injures 20

ROME (R) — About 20 people, most of them tourists, were treated in hospital for smoke inhalation and minor injuries early Saturday after fire raced through a small hotel near the Vatican, police said.

Witnesses reported scenes of panic as the guests of the Santa Anna Hotel, just metres away from one of the gates of Vatican city and St. Peter's Square, tried to flee the fire which broke out at around 4 a.m. (0300 GMT).

Some jumped from the hotel's first floor window on to large plastic rubbish bins moved in place

by fire brigades to break their fall.

An American couple used a bed sheet to lower their six-year-old child out of a third storey window. The child then fell on to the canopy over the hotel's entrance and was not injured.

Other guests of the hotel, in a old neighbourhood of narrow streets, escaped via a roof terrace to adjoining buildings.

The guests were taken to nearby hospitals for treatment and checks. Some suffered bruises in their attempt to escape. No serious injuries were reported.

Tajik police arrest man wanted for killing spree

DUSHANBE (AFP) — Police in Tajikistan have arrested a man wanted for slaughtering 10 people in the west of the Central Asian republic, an interior ministry spokesman said Saturday.

Mutivillo Nazirov, 25, was arrested Thursday and accused of gunning

down a family of three and seven other people Monday in Tursumzade, 60 kilometres from the capital Dushanbe.

The spokesman said Mr. Nazirov was believed to have shot the family "out of personal hatred" and then opened fire at people waiting at a bus stop,

Ethnic hatred divides Indonesian town after rampage

PAMANUKAN, Indonesia (AFP) — The central Indonesian town of Pamanukan awoke Saturday to find the fires from a vicious 10-hour riot stamped out, but its community divided by ethnic hatred.

Terrified ethnic Chinese residents remained in hiding at the town's police station after fleeing their looted and burning homes and shops Friday.

"Insane Chinese" and "Chinese get out" had been painted on one house which had been emptied of its entire contents.

Local shopkeepers daubed their doors and walls with the words "I love Islam" and "I am Muslim," and one nailed a Muslim prayer mat to his front door in a bid to escape the attacks. Churches serving the mainly Christian ethnic Chinese community were also targeted with pews looted, their windows and statues smashed while a gleaming mosque nearby remained unscratched.

"They just hate the Chinese," said Susintn, an ethnic Chinese trader whose family store was burned down despite being a feature of the town since the Dutch colonial era.

His mother Oei Giok Eng, in her fifties, said she had been forced to clamber over a 15-foot high wall topped with barbed wire and traverse a river to escape the mob ransacking their home.

The pair said they had taken refuge at a local official's home during the riot and would be staying at a church while they decided what to do next.

"The only things I have left are what I am wearing," said Winario, who hid out at the police station.

"I didn't have time to get anything," said the ethnic Chinese shopkeeper in his 60s.

"There were too many of them and I had to leave."

Troops toting automatic rifles, wearing full combat gear and body armour Saturday patrolled streets, littered with debris from the

riot and the burnt shells of several vehicles.

"They came into our house and took everything," hardware store owner Tjuan Huat said, as his wife lin wept uncontrollably at the police station.

"They even took the rings off my fingers, my shirt and the necklace off my wife's neck," added the storekeeper, sporting a shirt provided by police.

Officials said no casualties had been reported from the rioting, although one man died from a heart attack during the unrest. Police also said they were unaware of any shots being fired but a spent shell from a handgun was found in one street.

"We tried to get people out of their stores," one soldier said.

"But some of them refused and said they wanted to die in their stores."

Residents said most of the rioters were mostly from outside the town and some added they did not support the attacks on the ethnic Chinese.

"I think they're just criminals," one Muslim man said.

"People are looking for any opportunity to vent their frustration and they just follow the masses and attack the Chinese."

There was a carnival atmosphere in the nearby town Sukamandi Saturday morning as police stood by and watched looters raid a shop.

Crowds were eating away food and other supplies after tearing off the shop's doors in the Patok Besi area some 80 kilometres east of Jakarta but police made no move to intervene.

"Share the food, share the food," shouted the some 150 looters, mostly teenage boys but including children as young as five and men in their 20s and 30s.

The looters laughed and chased each other, throwing stolen popcorn in the air as they dragged away boxes of noodles, sacks of rice, potato chips and soft drinks.

They invited watebing reporters into the store, where they were smashing

crates of bottles and other goods.

"Everything is expensive," one of the looters told AFP.

The looters said they would not set fire to the shop as stores on either side were owned by Muslims and they were afraid the blaze could spread.

"It's social jealousy," said a watching government official, who declined to give his name.

About a dozen police officers carrying canes stood and sat around the shop as the looting continued and two soldiers directed traffic around the mob.

"There's too many of them," said Police Sergeant Sutanto as he watched on.

"We're just trying to make sure it doesn't spread to other stores."

He added that the shop's owner, an ethnic Chinese man who lived in the nearby town of Cikampek, had been told of the looting but was too scared to come to his store.

Australian republic push may face internal legal challenge

SYDNEY (AFP) — The outcome of historic talks here that culminated Friday in an overwhelming vote in favour of an Australian republic could be challenged in the courts, a hard-line republican said Saturday.

The two-week constitutional convention was nearly derailed by bitter infighting between republicans who argued over whether a president should be selected by popular ballot or a majority vote in parliament.

One of the direct election supporters, Paul Tully, said he had consulted a barrister, who advised him that the convention outcome was wrong and open to challenge.

He was considering federal court action on the validity of a ruling by the convention's acting chairman that the motion for the election of the president by parliamentary vote had been

carried by a majority.

The acting chairman had overruled Mr. Tully's point of order that the 57 votes against the motion, combined with 22 abstentions for a total of 79, meant the majority of the 152 delegates had not supported the motion and the 73 in favour had been defeated.

"The legal action could be very expensive if I lose, but I'm all or nothing on the issue of having a directly elected president in Australia," he said.

"I was elected to the convention where the people elected the president — not some phoney republic where the politicians in Canberra select our president," he said.

The republican model Mr. Tully opposes will now go up against Australia's current system of government, the constitutional monarchy, in a referendum next year.



Jose Angel Carrasco (left), one of the 300 jailed dissidents who was freed Feb. 13 following appeals by Pope John Paul II during his visit to Cuba last month, poses with his wife Lilia Mercedes Martell and his son Igor Carrasco (Reuters photo)

Catholics praise prisoner release, call for more talks with state

HAVANA (AFP) — Cuban Catholic bishops praised the prisoner release ordered by President Fidel Castro at the urging of Pope John Paul II, while calling for more openness and talks with the Communist regime.

The Cuban authorities released at least 13 prisoners Friday, although Havana said it would not pardon 70 others on a Vatican "prisoners of conscience" list.

The "70 counter-revolutionaries cannot be freed," the official daily Granma reported, even as the government announced it had freed or will release a total of 318 inmates, following the Pupal appeal for clemency.

Dissident sources said 12 inmates were released around midday Friday. It was not immediately known if they were political prisoners or people jailed for common crimes.

Praising the amnesty in a written statement late Friday, the country's Conference of Catholic Bishops called for the beginning of a "frank dialogue" with the Castro regime.

The message of Christ is not identified completely "with any single political-economic system," the bishops said in a six-page message titled "Open your heart to Christ!" made public hours after the prisoner release.

The bishops want to "broaden and increase a frank dia-

logue with the state institutions," it said.

The Catholic Church here has long had a cold and often tense relationship with the Communist government. Regular talks between the church and state officials — the first in 12 years — began in December, as part of preparations for the January visit of the Pope.

Now that the Pontiff has returned to the Vatican, a new forum for church-state talks has to be created, observers here say.

In the statement the bishops called on exiled Cubans to help create "a climate of positive dialogue and reciprocal understanding."

Hector Palacios, a dissident jailed since Jan. 9, 1996, and freed early Friday told AFP by telephone that his freedom was "unconditional."

The releases fall into line with the Pope's request that some 300 "prisoners of conscience" be pardoned and integrated into Cuban society.

Mr. Palacios, of the outlawed Democratic Solidarity Party, said he was jailed for criticising Castro's government for not meeting its commitment to democracy made at the 1996 Ibero-American Summit in Vina del Mar, Chile.

Seven dissidents released earlier this month after a hunger strike in the central city of Santa Clara were set free,

but only on the condition that they leave the country.

"If these releases lead to an increase in the sphere of freedom inside Cuba, they are an important development," U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said in Washington.

In total, 106 of 270 inmates on a list the Vatican gave Cuba Jan. 22 amid the Pope's landmark first visit to Communist-ruled Cuba "were already free," Granma reported, citing foreign ministry figures.

That leaves "around 20 cases in which a decision is pending," the newspaper said.

Those numbers suggest Cuba could free at least 74 people on the list, which Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano said Wednesday included more than 300 "prisoners of conscience."

Some 224 people not on the Vatican's request list will also be released, according to Granma.

The foreign ministry announced in a statement released to reporters Thursday that it would free more than 200 prisoners in the biggest single such release in a decade.

The statement was believed to mark the first time the Cuban government has recognised in an official document that there are people jailed here for political reasons.

Man shot in Belfast punishment attack

BELFAST (R) — A 22-year-old man was abducted and shot in the legs in a Roman Catholic area of Belfast in what police said appeared to be a paramilitary-style punishment shooting.

Police said the man was seized Friday night by four men who forced a hood over his head. He was then taken away in a car and shot

in both legs. He is being treated in hospital for gunshot wounds.

It was not clear who was responsible for the shooting which came after police accused the Irish Republican Army (IRA) of involvement in two guerrilla murders in Northern Ireland earlier in the week.

The IRA says its ceasefire, called in July, is still

intact and its Sinn Fein political wing is resisting calls for its explosion from all-party peace talks aimed at finding a political settlement over British rule of Northern Ireland.

Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam has said the question of Sinn Fein's future in the talks will be discussed when they reopen Monday.

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Annan makes right move

U.N. SECRETARY General Kofi Annan's last-ditch effort to defuse the Iraq crisis and seek a political solution have double goals. The first is to save the integrity and credibility of the international organisation in the face of increasing attempts by Washington and London to bypass it altogether. Mr. Annan has specifically in mind the U.N. Charter which stipulates the pursuance of peaceful means to settle conflicts and disputes. The charter only approves of military action after all peaceful efforts are exhausted and an approval obtained from the Security Council. Unless the U.N. then asserts itself it will face the same fate of its predecessor, the League of Nations, which after the World War II became ineffective in dealing with international conflicts.

The second thing the secretary general must have noted is that the gap between Baghdad and the U.N. on how to conduct the mandate of weapons inspection teams is not so large and unbridgeable as to necessitate a devastating military action that could lead to a heavy loss of life, and adversely affect the well-being of the peoples of the region.

While Mr. Annan has yet to announce his decision to visit Baghdad for peace talks to salvage the situation from deteriorating into an armed conflict, the secretary general is, meanwhile, sending a team of experts to survey the presidential sites. It is apparent though that despite prodding by three of the permanent council members, the U.S. is opposed to Mr. Annan visiting Iraq. Mr. Annan, it appears, wants the whole world to know which sites or presidential palaces that await inspection, and then seek a Security Council agreement on the modalities for carrying out such inspections.

Moscow, Paris and Beijing are stepping up pressure for a diplomatic solution. This is not to mention an overwhelming Arab support for a continued search for a political and peaceful resolution of the standoff. At the same time the Iraqi regime must go out of its way to make the efforts of Mr. Annan successful. There is more at stake than Iraq's sovereignty over the controversial palaces. The issue for Iraq is now to be or not to be. No price is too high for the preservation of Iraq and the protection of its territorial integrity.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Arab Al Yawm's Taher Adwan addressed the consequences of a U.S. military strike on Iraq saying Jordan would be the second victim after Iraq due to its dependence on Iraqi oil and markets for its products. As it looks now, the Arab states are helpless and are unable to do anything to save Iraq except with statements that they do not support a military strike, but the strike is coming, and Iraq is standing alone in the arena, said Adwan. He said Iraq, which has succumbed for many years to the desires of Washington and its allies and accepted the continued inspection and agreed to the U.N. Security Council's demands and resolutions, would not be harmed if it opens its so-called sensitive sites including presidential locations to the U.N. inspectors especially if such a move would save the nation from devastation. The Iraqi leadership ought to realise that nothing can protect its installations from destruction and its people from perishing except its acceptance of the unconditional search of these sites; and therefore it has no alternative but to agree to this demand, he said. The writer added that the whole Arab Nation, which had failed to come to the help of the Palestinians in their struggle to regain their legitimate rights, is in no position to extend any help to Iraq, neither now nor in the future.

Al Dustour's Oreib Rintawi criticised those who continue to brag about the need to help the tourism industry flourish and encourage investors' towards tourism, but in practice behave completely to the contrary. Citing the controversy raised by parliament members about Jordan Television hosting the Orbit-organised Arab Song Festival in Amman as an example, the writer said it was an event that attracted tourists and helped Jordan earn hard currency. Those deputies who attacked Jordan Television for co-sponsoring the event pretended to be oblivious to the fact that the same Jordan Television had presented similar festivals held in other Arab states with the same women Arab performers and hosts, who presented the show to the public without any protest raised, he said. The writer cited another example of acts that ruin tourism by pointing to the controversy in parliament over whether to segregate men and women at public swimming pools and beaches. He said how can Jordan be expected to compete with public pools and beaches which allow mixed swimming in Lebanon, Syria and Israel if it segregates swimmers in Jordan? He said the Jordanian public, which supports song festivals and opposes segregation of public swimming areas, had hoped that parliament would undertake practical steps towards marketing Jordan abroad to attract visitors and boost the tourism industry.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

Tallying up the brighter side of the economy

By Dr. Fahed Fanek

LECTURING ON the prospects of the Jordanian economy at Abdul Hamid Shoman Foundation last week, Dr. Munir Hamaneh painted a black picture of the past, present, and future of the Jordanian economy.

Coming from the newly elected secretary general of the Jordanian Communist Party, that outcome was not a surprise to me. After all it is the duty of the opposition to criticise and point out the failures and shortcomings of the government and ignore the successes and achievements.

However, to be fair, one should not ignore the brighter side of the economic development of Jordan in the past 50 years, which transformed the stagnant and primitive economy to a relatively vibrant and prosperous economy. This is the least concession expected from an academician with a title of professor of economics at the University of Jordan.

It is true that the current average annual per capita income of JD1,200 is still too little in comparison to the prevailing average in the industrialised countries, but it is more than satisfactory in comparison to what it used to be in 1950, less than JD30. Of course the above comparison may change in a negative way if figures were adjusted to inflation to measure the standard of living in real terms, but it is equally true that the comparison will change in a positive way if we take into account that the

population of the country increased ten-fold during the same period.

A reasonable and objective analyst, especially a university professor, should not ignore the other side of the coin, namely the obvious achievements. For instance electricity now reaches 99 per cent of the Jordanian households. Ninety-eight per cent of the population have access to clean water. The school enrolment rate is 100 per cent, and exports of commodities top \$2 billion.

All these and other achievements did not come about by accident, nor by way of ill planning, mismanagement and corruption.

When it comes to external indebtedness, the lecturer warned that debt is on the rise under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme. The record proves contrary. Indebtedness actually declined from \$8.5 billion in 1991 to \$6.5 billion in 1998, a net decrease of \$2 billion over seven years. What is more meaningful is that the ratio of external indebtedness to gross domestic product (GDP) declined from 200 per cent to 85 per cent, much lower than the ambitious programme anticipated. The relative burden of debt service dropped tremendously. In fact the problem of external indebtedness was contained and brought under control.

Finally, one should dwell a bit on some misconceptions put forth by Dr. Hamaneh.

For instance, the cheap wheat imported from America did not necessarily hurt the Jordanian farmer during the past decades, simply because the farmers were not supposed to sell their produced wheat in a free market with depressed prices, the government used to purchase the harvest at a subsidised price way above market price. When bread was sold at 50 fils per kilogramme, wheat was bought from the farmers at 120 fils per kilogramme. The government could have pleased the analyst if it bought the American wheat cheap and sold the bread at a very high price to absorb the dumping price and help the farmers, but would a Communist support hiking the prices of bread? Don't forget that local production of wheat did not exceed 10 per cent of local consumption. Should the government, under the circumstances, have looked for wheat to import from the world market at higher prices?

Another misconception is related to eliminating subsidy on animal feed, especially in the Badia. One should realise that the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Supply was actually subsidising Saudi Arabia. The four million heads of sheep which used to be raised in Al Badia, consuming subsidised feed at the expense of Jordanian taxpayers, were not meant for local consumption. They were exported to Saudi Arabia. Subsidy was and will always be an invitation to distortion and corruption.

Britain considers status of its last colonies

By Gwynne Dyer

THERE ARE two problems with running a global empire. One is that all your far-flung subjects feel they have a right to come and live in the "mother country." The other is the left-overs.

attitude towards its colonial subjects: their job was to shut up, send money, and stay put. But last week Foreign Secretary Robin Cook hinted to a conference of the Dependent Territories Association in London that he was going to give them back their British pass-

ports. Real ones, that is, carrying the right to live in Britain itself, like the ones they all had before 1962. That was when the British government, facing an influx of East African Asians expelled from Uganda by dictator Idi Amin, abruptly changed the rules, giving all its overseas subjects passports that no longer carried the "right of abode" in Britain.

...while both the Foreign Office and the Home Office have been consistently mean-spirited and racist over the decades, the actual population has responded to the arrival of millions of immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean with remarkable tolerance and flexibility.

This racist act unjustly deprived people of a citizenship their ancestors had held for generations (over three centuries, in the cases of Bermuda), but it had an even worse side-effect. It signalled that Britain was no longer interested in the fate of its smaller possessions — which was perfectly true, of course, but also dangerously encouraging to neighbours with territorial claims.

After Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in 1981, the few thousand Falklanders and the inhabitants of Gibraltar (which is

claimed by Spain) got full British citizenship back. But the other colonies did not, partly because most of their inhabitants were black, but mostly because giving them full citizenship might create a legal basis for 6 million Hong Kongers to demand the same

promise to "send them home."

Huge ghettos have grown up in the bleak suburbs that surround big French cities, and police behaviour is often tantamount to licensed racism.

Britain is no earthly paradise, but the contrast is huge. About 5 per cent of the total British population (but nearly ten per cent of school-age children) are non-white, and in big cities the ratio is far higher. The racial and cultural differences are, if anything, greater than those separating the "old" and the "new" French, but the whole experience has been far more positive.

Individuals may be racist, but there is nothing like the level of tension that typifies French (or indeed American) race relations. In the younger generation, there is an astonishingly high rate of inter-racial dating and intermarriage: 30 per cent of British-born West Indians under the age of 30, for example, are in multi-racial relationships.

The British, contrary to all the stereotypes, have turned out to be rather good at living in a "post-modern" multi-cultural society. And since they elected Tony Blair's "New Labour" government last May, those attitudes may finally be percolating up to their rulers.

Not all parts of the British government have been transformed, needless to say. Robin Cook's proposal to restore full British citizenship to all of Britain's remaining overseas subjects met with an instant, angry rejection from Home Secretary Jack Straw, a tightly conservative man who often seems to be in the wrong party.

But it will be Cook who finally wins the argument — once the

government finds lawyers who can draft the legislation in a way that restores citizenship to Britain's 160,000 current overseas subjects without opening the government up to claims from the Hong Kongers it handed over to China last year.

...popular attitudes in France towards non-white immigrants are deeply hostile, with over 10 per cent of the population voting for openly neo-fascist parties that promise to "send them home."

That's really what it has all been about for the past decade, at least: "Protecting" Britain from a flood of Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong. So they went elsewhere, mostly to Canada, Australia, and the United States (in that order), to the immense benefit of those countries instead. And Britain got exactly what it deserved: nothing. But belatedly, it is doing the decent thing for its other overseas citizens.

New Israeli historians reveal facts on expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland

By Pascal B. Karny

PALESTINIANS AND Arab historians have always maintained that about 800,000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homeland in 1948 and after. The famous Plan Dalet, as conceived by the leaders of the Jews in Palestine, was a master-plan for the seizure of most or all of Palestine. The aim of the plan was control of the area given to the Jews by the United Nations Partition Resolution of Nov. 29, 1947 in addition to areas occupied by the Jews which were outside those borders and the setting up of forces to counter possible invasion of Arab armies.

The plan was also designed to cleanse such areas of their Arab inhabitants. In this way the Jews would expand the irreducible minimum which the United Nations had granted them and make their state as large and Jewish as possible before the Arab armies could stop them and before it dawned upon the United Nations that its partition plan was unworkable.

At the outset the Jews alleged that the Palestinians voluntarily fled in 1948 and afterwards, especially in response to the appeal of their leaders who promised them a quick return to their homes after victory. They spread the myth that the refugees fled without cause at the express instructions of their own politicians. In 1959, however, Palestinian scholar Walid Khalidi rebutted this myth by his painstaking research which was corroborated by the work of Irish scholar Eirkin Childers. The Jewish Agency also alleged that the Jews did not plan the eviction of the Palestinians from their homes and that the rare massacres such as that of Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948 were perpetrated by extremist forces led by the Irgun of Menachem Begin and Lehi of Yitzhak Shamir. In fact, however, the Deir Yassin massacre was an integral part of the Plan Dalet.

As Emile Zola says in his book J'accuse: "If you shut up truth and bury it under the ground, it will but grow." Thus at last the new Israeli historians have revealed the truth in the 1980s about the expulsion of the Palestinians and brought to light the facts which were buried in the Israeli archives. Historian Beni Morris, author of the book The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, together with other new historians such as Zimmerman Simha Flapan, Tom Segev and Ilan Pappé, attacked the myths surrounding the history of the creation of Israel, reviewed in particular the history of the first Arab-Israeli war and revealed thereby the truths of the Palestinian exodus.

What prompted these Israeli historians to start their painstaking research was that Israel opened its archives to the public.

What prompted these Israeli historians to start their painstaking research was that Israel opened its archives to the public. Their research showed that the Jewish community in Palestine in 1948 was not weak or unarmed or threatened with extermination by an allegedly united and heavily armed Arab World. On the contrary these historians have found that Israel at that time was strong and well-prepared for the war and enjoyed many assets and advantages in its favour in comparison to its enemies: the Arab Palestinian people were in disarray, the Arab World was divided and weak and its armed forces inadequate and inferior to those of the Jewish forces. In addition, Israel received aeroplanes from Czechoslovakia and had the support of the United States and of the Soviet Union as well as the sympathy of world public opinion.

In his book Morris provides a general pic-

ture of the exodus of the Palestinians. He states that some inhabitants fled after the onslaught of the Jewish troops, others were expelled by armed forces, others fled as a result of panic after the fall of neighbouring towns or villages or after rumours spread by the Haganah radio and the Jewish forces particularly after the slaughter of all the inhabitants of Deir Yassin. The author states also that there is no proof at all that the Arab governments or the Palestine Arab Higher Committee had called for a mass exodus of the inhabitants or ordered them to flee from their homes. On the contrary those who ran away were threatened with severe punishment. Moreover, they opened archives of

the Arab governments, contemporary Arabic newspapers and the radio-monitory reports of both the BBC and CIA, all of which show no such calls or orders had been issued. Far from urging the people to flee, the Grand Mufti of Palestine Haj Amin Hussein, head of the Arab Higher Committee, (who was then in exile) was so alarmed at the incipient exodus that he sent a cable to one of his staff as follows: "The emigration of children and others from Palestine to Syria is detrimental to our interest. Contact the proper authorities in Damascus and Beirut to prevent it."

A typical example of the expulsion of the Palestinians is that of Ramleh and Lydda on July 12, 1948. Ben-Gurion himself ordered their expulsion as proven by the memoirs of Yitzhak Rabin. The violent repression by the Jewish forces resulted in 250 dead, of whom there were disarmed prisoners followed by the forces' eviction of about

70,000 Palestinian civilians. Morris says that similar scenarios as those of Ramleh and Lydda were put into effect in central and north of Galilee and in the north of the Negev including after the cessation of the war, the expulsion of the people of Al Majdal (now renamed Ashkelon). And with the exception of the latter case all the Jewish military operations were often marked by atrocities.

In his book entitled, The First Israelis, Segev quotes the statement made by Aharon Zisling, then minister of agriculture in the Israeli Council of Ministers meeting held on November 17, 1948: "I could not sleep tonight. What is happening shocks my soul, that of my family and the soul of all of us. Now the Jews behave like the Nazis and my whole being is shocked."

Pappé, author of the book The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, describes Plan Dalet as a "Strategy of Expulsion" and observes that the plan did not leave any doubt about the intention of David Ben-Gurion and his colleagues. The plan, says the author, provided for military operations against the centres of the enemy, inhabitants situated in the middle of the Israeli defence system or near thereto in order to prevent those centres from being used by any active enemy forces. The operations were carried out as follows: either by destroying the villages by fire or by dynamite and then laying mines in the debris, or by applying scraping operations, that is to say, encirclement of the village, and in case of resistance, the villages would be annihilated and the inhabitants expelled outside the borders of the state of Israel.

In summary the archives of the state of Israel prove beyond any doubt that the expulsion of the Palestinians was systematically programmed in advance of the war of 1948 and that the Jews had committed atrocities against the Palestinians in all parts of Palestine in 1948 and afterwards.

Cult of noble horse alive in Turkmenistan

By Dmitry Solovoy
Reuters

ASHGABAT. Turkmenistan — Horse men may be a popular delicacy across much of Central Asia but not in Turkmenistan, home to a millennium-old cult of the noble Akhal Teke horse.

While shops and markets in neighbouring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan groan with "kazy" sausages and "zhaya" sirloin made from wild steppe horses, the Akhal Teke thoroughbreds are called "friends" in Turkmenistan and enjoy great respect.

"Getting up in the morning, greet your father and then see your horse," runs an ancient Turkmen saying.

Watching these agile, good-natured horses with their intelligent eyes, proudly upright heads and sleek coats ranging from black to golden, a visitor can begin to understand the Turkmen's love and respect for the Akhal Teke breed.

"If the carpet is the Turkmen's soul, the horse is his wings," says another favourite proverb of the Turkmen, who are descended from nomadic Turkic tribes.

Wars, atrocious rulers — the rich history of the Akhal Teke

Horse-breeding specialists say that millennia of harsh history have helped shape the noble breed.

The armies of Alexander the Great and Persian rulers rolled across Turkmen deserts in ancient times.

"And invaders would take with them Turkmen horses because of their majestic form, speed and stamina," said Gedy Kyarizov, head of the state company Turkmen Horses.

Gradually the Akhal Teke breed, which Kyarizov said was at least 2,000 years old, became a symbol of majesty and wealth.

"Akhal Teke horses were offered as gifts to rulers and the nobility. Their external appearance speaks for itself," said Kyarizov, pointing proudly to a shiny black stallion at a large horse-breeding farm near the Turkmen capital Ashgabat.

"Besides having noble names, these horses were buried with kingly honours when they died," Kyarizov said.

The stallion Keimir the Second, with a pedigree dating back more than a century, gazed haughtily at visitors.

Since they were bred for monarchs and the nobility,

the number of Akhal Teke horses was never large. Kyarizov said.

Only around 2,000 Akhal Teke horses now exist in the world, including between 1,200 and 1,300 in Turkmenistan, he said.

But while the breed was revered in ancient and mediaeval times, the Akhal Teke suffered a setback during the Soviet era.

Soviet era — a black period for the noble breed

When the Bolsheviks ended 30 years of Russian tsarist rule in the early 1920s, many things improved, including the selection and registration of Akhal Teke horses.

But the programme "to catch up with and surpass the west", launched in the 1950s by then Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, is still remembered with horror in this largely desert nation.

Khrushchev ordered the slaughter of horses for meat in 1956. Victims of the order included the Turkmen breed, Kyarizov said.

"Whole horse-breeding farms were devastated, including this one where only 35 or 40 horses survived the slaughter," he said. There are now about 450 horses at the farm.

Tonnes of cheap propaganda horse sausage, seen by Turkmen as a sacrilegious product, were a poor substitute for lost hard-currency earnings from possible sales of the horses abroad.

"Khrushchev thought that one tractor could easily replace 100 horses," Kyarizov said. "At the same time, Soviet leaders presented Akhal Teke horses to heads of other states."

Things started changing for the better only after the Soviet Union collapsed in late 1991.

Turkmen cult of noble horse thrives again

Independence for Turkmenistan — a country of around four million, rich in natural gas but nonetheless short of financial capital — has brought hopes for a new prosperity in a market economy.

It has also led to the revival of the Turkmen's culture after decades of tight control from Moscow.

Turkmen, whose nomadic ancestors were free to elect their tribal leaders, often seem irritated by the personality cult generated around their president, Saparmurat Niyazov, but the cult of the Akhal Teke appears to

be generally accepted.

Amid the ornamental designs of famous Turkmen carpets, the Akhal Teke horse now stands at the centre of the national emblem.

Like Niyazov's face, the horse is printed on every banknote of the national unit currency, and monuments to the horse are often found near statues to the president, who styles himself "Turkmenbashi" (head of the Turkmen).

The holiday of the Turkmen horse is celebrated with races and a colourful gala on the last Sunday of April.

But horses are more than a revered symbol of national pride and history. They are also a subtle tool of foreign policy.

As in ancient times, Turkmen horses have been presented to many foreign leaders, including Russian President Boris Yeltsin, former British Prime Minister John Major and the late French President Francois Mitterrand.

Turkmenistan once narrowly escaped a diplomatic scandal when Iran's ex-President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was thrown from his Akhal Teke almost as soon as he climbed onto it.

Auctions seen as panacea for cash-short horse-breeding

But the horse's international renown has not yet solved the main problem of Turkmen horse-breeding culture — a lack of cash.

Like many in Turkmenistan, Kyarizov says that international auctions of Turkmen horses might help rake in money. The first such auction is due to take place in April.

"At least 50 thoroughbred horses are being put up for the auction in Ashgabat," he said.

Horse experts in Turkmenistan refuse to say exactly how much they expect to raise from each sale but hint that the price might run into hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Noting the speed and stamina of the Akhal Teke breed, they say the horses can easily return at international races the money invested in them.

But it is also a question of prestige

"This is a living antique of the planet," Kyarizov said. "With Allah's help, every self-respecting millionaire will very soon want to have Akhal Teke horses in his stables."

The new Mideast Hollywood

By John Lancaster

DAMASCUS, Syria — From Lebanon to the Persian Gulf, television viewers are tuning in to The Mirror, the Arab World's answer to Saturday Night Live.

Irreverent in the extreme, the hour-long comedy show takes gleeful aim at uncaring bureaucrats, autocratic rulers and other distinguishing features of Arab politics and society. One recent episode, "The Tribal Conference," parodied a summit meeting of Arab leaders, depicting them as self-important buffoons whose search for "Arab unity" ends in squabbles over soccer matches and a riot of hurled paper and insults.

Another depicts the Kafkaesque struggles of "Essam" — a young Syrian woman named after a boy — to avoid the draft by persuading government bureaucrats that she is, in fact, a female.

In a region where governments traditionally show little tolerance for dissent, such pungent political satire is as rare as it is popular. What makes The Mirror even more remarkable, however, is that it originates in Syria.

Despite its well-deserved reputation for political repression Syria has emerged as a leading producer of Arab television entertainment, much of it surprisingly bold in its treatment of sensitive themes.

Besides The Mirror, Syrian-made programmes now

airing around the Middle East include a lavish adaptation of Shakespeare's King Lear and historical dramas such as The Silk Market, a hugely popular serial that casts a critical eye on the brief, unhappy union between Syria and Egypt from 1958 to 1961.

With a dozen or more private production firms, a recently inaugurated government-owned satellite channel and a strong tradition of dramatic arts, Syria is poised to challenge Egypt as "the Hollywood of the Middle East," ...

With a dozen or more private production firms, a recently inaugurated government-owned satellite channel and a strong tradition of dramatic arts, Syria is poised to challenge Egypt as "the Hollywood of the Middle East," television producers and actors here say.

"We have new ideas and new subjects," said Hatim Ali, 35, who produces The Mirror for a private company here. "The Egyptians are repeating themselves."

Much of what Syrian television offers is heavily flavoured with propaganda, such as the 1996 hit Brothers of Sand, an ambitious, privately produced war epic whose depictions of Turkish atrocities against Arab soldiers during World

War I — including a graphic impalement scene — sparked formal diplomatic protests from Ankara.

The limits of free expression are clear. It would be unthinkable for The Mirror, or any other programme, to poke fun at a specific Arab ruler, least of all Hafez

dictatorship," he said.

But according to diplomats and Syrian television officials, Assad has promoted the growth and export of Syrian television entertainment as a means of boosting his claim to leadership of the Arab World — a status Syrian officials say he has earned in light of his resolute defiance of Israel.

"Syria's essential position make it important to be admired all over the Arab World," said Adel Yazigi, the director of state television. "Syria stayed firm and consistent and straight. That's why people like to see what is coming out of Syria."

With that in mind, Yazigi said, the government in 1988 sought to boost the output of Syria's entertainment industry by encouraging private production, easing import restrictions on cameras and other television gear and expanding the margins of free expression.

Syria's satellite station, which broadcasts locally produced fare throughout the Arab World, went on the air three years ago; the government will soon begin work on a new studio complex in the ancient city of Aleppo.

Syrian writers and producers still must submit their projects to Yazigi's office for prior review. Asked whether his office practices censorship, he replied, "There are no restrictions. There is encouragement."

With satellite television, however, government control is ebbing. Although technically illegal, satellite

dishes are widely used in Syria, giving viewers access to a variety of Arabic-language programmes carried by Middle Eastern satellite stations such as the Saudi-owned Orbit network. As a result, the government has eased restrictions on content to keep Syrian television competitive with foreign rivals, producers say.

"The satellite stations have given people options," said Aynan Zaidan, one of Syria's best-known actors and the general director of the Chem Production Co., which is owned by a son of Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam. "It improved the tastes of the audience and it creates competition."

In the same vein, satellite companies such as Orbit increasingly are underwriting Syrian productions, which gives them greater control over the content. For example, in The Silk Market, this year's hit series on the Syrian-Egyptian union, Syrian secret police were depicted as drunken libertines in several scenes cut by state television.

But Orbit, which helped finance the programme, broadcast the uncensored version to countries throughout the Middle East, Syria included. "You can watch the uncensored version on satellite TV," a Western diplomat said, speaking anonymously. "If I were a government censor, I'd say there's no point in being real obvious about this."

Reprinted from The Jerusalem Post

U.N. wins unlikely support in its bid for a sea change

This year the United Nations marks the International Year of the Ocean; 50th anniversary of the U.N. International Maritime Organisation on March 6. And with over-fishing, pollution and potentially violent disputes over resources, there are plenty of reasons for trying to put the international spotlight on the oceans. Oliver Burkeman looks at the latest "U.N. Year."

LONDON — Strange bedfellows do not come much stranger than Newt Gingrich, speaker of the United States House of Representatives, and the United Nations.

Gingrich once denounced the U.N. as "a failed institution in its current form, with grotesque aspirations to be a world government" and "an irritant" in domestic politics. His is also among the fingers on the purple strings that prevent Washington from paying its \$1.4 billion arrears to the world organisation.

Yet last year, he gave his enthusiastic support to a conference held in Washington by the international environmental group ACOPS (the Advisory Committee on the Protection of the Sea) in preparation for the U.N.'s "International Year in the Ocean" in 1998.

Entitled "Oceans and Security," the conference was a precursor to the group's global conference in Stockholm in February, which will launch the non-government organisation (NGO) sector's contribution to the year-long programme of events.

Even before the "Year" has got up steam, questions are being asked about its usefulness.

It follows a variety of U.N. "years" to mark global issues, ranging from human rights to poverty eradication. Next year it will be the turn of "older people." In addition, 14 overlapping U.N. International Decades are under way, including those spotlighting disarmament and indigenous peoples.

Newt Gingrich is not renowned for his compassion, and might be expected to dismiss such publicity exercises as further examples of a U.N. penchant for ill-thought-out, irrelevant, money-wasting gestures.

Yet he announced that he "wished to provide any assistance... to ensure the achievement of measurable results" for the Year of the Ocean.

Admiral Paul Gaffney of the U.S. Navy hinted at the reason for Gingrich's interest when he told the ACOPS conference that "a modern military must be concerned with environmental issues beyond its borders. Environmental degradation [leads] to conflicts that draw neighbours and allies into regional turmoil."

Environmentalists and international do-gooders have been expressing that sentiment for years. But it was still a significant moment. Military men such as Gaffney and politicians like Gingrich — traditionally more interested in defence than deforestation — are beginning to heed U.N. warnings that the sustainable management of natural resources, including the seas, is now more than a matter of feel good conservatism. It is a question of national security.

"The sea is the very source of life

— is water, and 3.6 billion people live within 60 kilometres of a coast. Deep-sea currents play a crucial role in regulating atmospheric temperature. More than 12.5 million fishermen annually net 90 million tonnes of fish. There are an estimated 36.5 billion tonnes of oil and 21,400 billion tonnes of gas under the sea, plus many other minerals.

There are untapped — even, as yet, unknown — resources too. UNESCO is fond of pointing out that we know less about the marine environment than we do about Mars.

Only five years ago, divers discovered a community of giant tube worms, clams and bacteria living in super-hot underwater volcanic vents in toxic hydrogen sulphide. The bacteria may have uses in waste treatment, pharmaceuticals and other industries.

But the wealth of the seas is in

as a baton, and special sets of postage stamps.

An Ocean Charter has been drawn up by the organisers. It asks states to commit to cooperative efforts to use sea resources sustainably. But it is only a statement of broad principle — stating, "The oceans and their resources are a necessary element of life on this planet," — not a legally binding document.

"It's all very much a list of beliefs and hopes, without specifying any actual action except awareness-raising," said Samantha Pollard, conservation officer at the Britain-based Marine Conservation Society.

She said the need was to show governments that it was time to implement past promises on issues such as promoting sustainable fishing and ending marine pollution. But the U.N. was largely paying lip-service to ocean protection. NGOs would be left to shoulder the burden of any practical changes to result from the "Year."

Caution is necessary, because some U.N. "Years" have flopped. To be fair to the world body, however, the aim of the Year of the Ocean, as with previous efforts, is not to establish a new programme, which it is not empowered to do, but to draw attention to an issue and to encourage governments to take action.

Any expenditure must be covered by member states or raised separately. "Not very much has been raised yet," admitted Hélène Gosselin, Commissioner General for the U.N. at Expo 98 in Portugal.

A few governments have responded. The Dutch are helping fund the offices in The Hague of OCEAN98, an organisation created to publicise the "Year." Canada is sponsoring the charter campaign.

If the admirable aims of the "Year" are to become reality, Gosselin will need to find more money — and not by asking the U.S. Otherwise, Newt Gingrich's newfound enthusiasm for the fate of the seas may sink, without trace.

— Gemini News

The writer is a British journalist who contributes to The Observer in London and a range of other publications.

Iraq pins hopes on possible visit by Annan amid U.S. warnings

(Continued from page 11)

David Newton, a fluent Arabic speaker who formerly served as ambassador to several Arab countries including Iraq, will set off on Saturday for Cairo, the officials said.

Apart from Egypt he will visit all six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman — plus Syria, Jordan and possibly Lebanon and Yemen, they said.

"The purpose is to make the case to the media and opinion makers that our policy is the correct one," an official said.

The U.S. meanwhile continued its military buildup.

The U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Henry Shelton, said the United States had developed a detailed plan to attack Iraq and armed U.S. commanders with all the weapons they need to carry it out.

"We have our objectives

laid out, and we know exactly what it will take to do that and we'll know when we've achieved those objectives and we in fact could stop at that point," he said.

In Kuwait, newspapers reported that the Kuwaiti army has massed troops on the border with Iraq as it prepares to welcome 3,000 U.S. Marines who are due to start arriving on Sunday.

"Kuwaiti forces are deployed along the northern border with Iraq, they are ready to defend the country," said Al Watan newspaper, citing a military source.

More than 40 combat aircraft are also on their way to the Gulf, where the United States has already stationed 13 warships including two aircraft carriers.

Saudi Arabia on Saturday pressed for continued diplomatic efforts to find a solution to the Iraq weapons crisis and urged Baghdad to abide by U.N. resolutions to avoid a threatened U.S. attack.

"I hope that God leads our

brothers in Iraq to the right path and that they agree to completely respect U.N. Security Council resolutions in order to avoid misfortune," said Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan Ben Abdul Aziz Al Saud.

"We hope that peaceful efforts continue to try to resolve the crisis," he said, the official SPA news agency said.

The secretary general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Izzeddin Laraki, said on Saturday he was ready to go to Iraq to help solve Baghdad's crisis with the United Nations.

Mr. Laraki also expressed "optimism" about a peaceful solution to the Iraqi crisis after receiving a message from Mr. Annan, the Egyptian daily Al Ahram reported.

"This message confirms that Mr. Annan's positions are close to the Arab and Muslim positions," Mr. Laraki said.

Jordan, Iraq to sign trade protocol today

By Ghalia Alul
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Jordan and Iraq began talks on Saturday on ways to expand the level of bilateral trade under a protocol for 1998 expected to be signed today.

Iraq wants Jordan to expand volume of trade above its levels under which the Kingdom supplied Baghdad with U.N. authorised goods and services worth \$255 million.

Jordanian industrialists were pushing for an increase in the volume of trade with Iraq to \$300 million this year.

However, Minister of Industry and Trade Hani Mulki told reporters following a meeting with his Iraqi counterpart, Mohammad Mahdi Saleh, that "the volume of trade with Iraq will depend on Jordan's needs of oil."

Some officials suggested that the trade protocol with Iraq should be the same as last year's because of weaker international oil prices.

In December, Iraq agreed to supply Jordan with its full oil needs of 4.8 million tonnes in 1998 at half the world price under an annual oil deal with Jordan.

Iraq is currently charging

Jordan only \$8.4 per barrel — half of Iraq's ceiling of \$16.8 — which would reduce Kingdom's final bill for 1998 to \$300 million.

Only around \$300 million to \$350 million will remain for Baghdad from its oil sales to Amman and that is paid to Jordanian firms for exports of food and medicine which are allowed under the sanctions.

During Saturday's meeting, Jordan and Iraq discussed means of enhancing trade exchange between them as well as including, in the 1998 protocol, new commodities that have more value added from Jordan.

The Iraqi minister said the volume of trade between Jordan and Iraq under the 1997 protocol was the highest since the U.N. imposed sanctions on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The U.N. has banned all Iraqi exports and allowed Baghdad to import only a limited list of food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies.

Dr. Saleh said discussions are underway to expand the list of goods that Jordan exports to its eastern neighbour to include Jordanian-made cheese, legumes and poultry farming facilities.

"Jordan can benefit from

exporting these commodities in addition to its current exports of vegetable oils, soap and detergents," Dr. Saleh told Jordanian traders during a meeting at the Chamber of Commerce.

Iraq has also been requesting that Jordan buy its needs of maize, sulphur, dates, leather and urea from the Iraqi market. But business sources say this could not happen without a U.N. permission.

Also on Saturday both sides discussed ways to implement deals for the sale of \$200 million in Jordanian goods to Iraq under the limited oil-for-food programme.

Dr. Mulki said Jordan was one of the few countries that was granted a high percentage of contracts under the U.N. authorised oil-for-food deal.

However, officials said, the implementation of some deals was delayed because of the latest standoff between Iraq and the U.N. over weapons inspections.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan recently issued a proposal to increase, from \$2 billion to \$5.256 billion, the amount of oil Iraq would be permitted to sell over six months in order to buy food, medicine and other supplies.

The proposal was aimed at

providing greater benefits for ordinary Iraqis, many suffering from malnutrition because of strict U.N. sanctions imposed since Baghdad's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Dr. Saleh said Iraq had to stop dealing with three Jordanian companies because of their affiliations with other foreign businesses, which the minister said "was in violation of the Iraqi law."

Jordan and Iraq also discussed the possibility of using the Aqaba port as a main facility to export Jordanian goods to Baghdad.

"Before the sanctions our imports reached \$20 billion and the main conduit that absorbed most of our imports was the Aqaba port," said Dr. Saleh.

Jordan's Red Sea port has been the main transit route for Iraqi imports and exports since the 1980s when the Iran-Iraq war endangered shipping in the Gulf.

Iraq remains a main market for Jordanian industries many of which mushroomed during Baghdad's 1980-1988 war with Tehran to cater solely for the Iraqi market.

Jordanian exports to Iraq in 1997 accounted for 40 per cent of overall exports to other Arab countries.

Arab Gulf states urged to study Asian financial crisis

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Arab Gulf states should study the current financial crisis in South East Asia to avert similar problems in their drive to expand their oil-reliant economies, a Gulf official has said.

The six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which control nearly 45 per cent of the world's oil wealth, are giving priority to attracting foreign capital to develop non-oil industries but such investments remain relatively small, said Abdul Rahman Al Jaafari, secretary general of the Doha-based Gulf Organisation for Industrial Consulting (GOIC).

Since 1980, the GCC has attracted \$31.4 billion in direct foreign capital compared with \$128 billion invested in China over the same period, he told the United Arab Emirates (UAE) newspaper Al Ittihad.

"Comparing investments in the GCC with foreign investments in the Asian countries, we find that they are low," Mr. Jaafari said.

"But the economic crisis in Asia should prompt us to concentrate our efforts to know whether there is any

link between that crisis and the large-scale investments there ... We should benefit from this experience and work to avoid the negative effects of such policies," he stressed.

GCC states Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are attempting to attract foreign capital to diversify their economies, which are heavily reliant on oil exports.

"We should devise policies to encourage investors, including easing restrictions on foreign ownership, development of the stock market and the banking system and boosting economic coordination in the GCC," Mr. Jaafari said.

The GCC, a loose economic, political and defence alliance created in 1981, produces around 14.5 million barrels per day of oil, providing it with more than two thirds of its total income.

Non-oil exports have steadily grown over the past decade, peaking at around \$16 billion in 1996.

Foreign investment in Ukraine tops \$759 million in 1997

KIEV (AFP) — Ukraine last year received \$759.2 million in foreign investment, an increase of 42.9 per cent over 1996's total, Interfax said Friday citing the national statistics committee.

Countries from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Baltic states accounted for \$67.7 million of that amount.

Overall foreign investment in the ex-Soviet republic since 1991 reached \$2.05 billion by January of this year.

U.S. investors accounted for \$381.2 million — 18.6 per cent of the total — followed by the Nether-

lands (\$214 million), Germany (\$184.7 million), Russia (\$150.4 million), Britain (\$149.9 million), Cyprus (\$125.6 million) and Liechtenstein (\$123.4 million).

Foreign investors concentrated the largest amount of money into the food industry (\$422.1 million), retail and wholesale (\$337.6 million), finance and securities (\$174.1 million), engineering and metals processing (\$168.7 million) and construction (\$90.6 millions).

Illegal sector fastest-growing in Turkey's economy

ISTANBUL (AFP) — The Turkish economy is caught in a vicious circle of criminal and illegal practices that will end in disaster if drastic measures are not taken soon, a Turkish economist has warned.

"It is impossible to overestimate the danger to our economy as well as to our society," Ahmet Fazil Ozsoylu, economist at the Cukurova University in Adana and author of a recent report entitled "The Crime Economy" for the Young Businessmen Association of Turkey (TUGIAD), told AFP.

"We urgently need reforms of the legal as well as the political system," Mr. Ozsoylu said, pointing to drug trafficking, mafia activities, corruption, child labour and rampant infringement on copyright and intellectual property laws in Turkey.

The most urgent priority, according to Mr. Ozsoylu, is an end to the armed conflict between the Turkish

army and the separatist Kurdistan Labour Party (PKK) in the south-east of the country, financed by taxes on one side and by large-scale drug-trafficking on the other.

"The longer the war lasts, the more weapons the PKK needs and the more drugs will be smuggled to buy those arms," Mr. Ozsoylu said, estimating the current volume of drug trafficking in Turkey at "well over 12 per cent of gross national product (GNP)."

Corruption of the bureaucracy is also near the top of Ozsoylu's list. With a more than six-fold growth of the apparatus over the past 50 years and inflation devouring low wages in the public sector, Turks have to pay bribes even to get their income tax returns processed, his report says.

Another vicious circle pointed out in the report is the widespread use of illegal immigrant labour and child labour in the Turkish economy.

"Anyone who won't employ illegal immigrants or children nowadays will lose his competitive edge," Ozsoylu said.

Although child labour is illegal in Turkey, children account for more than 15 per cent of the workforce, according to official figures quoted in the report.

Similarly, flagrant violations of copyright laws and theft of intellectual property are considered normal business practice, he complained.

"Production of so-called Lacoste shirts is a huge industry here, but the fact remains that it's illegal — and someday this will catch up with us."

The author points to the rapid population growth, wild urbanisation and lack of proper employment in Turkey as one cause for the growth of the illegal sector of the economy.

At the same time, he says, the secular state has lost its moral authority over a people who draw

their ethical convictions from their religion.

This problem has been compounded by charges of corruption against prominent political leaders and the revelation of ties between the mafia and the state in the so-called Susurluk scandal.

The understaffed and unwieldy legal system is no deterrent to crime or shady practices either, Mr. Ozsoylu says; trials drag on for months and years. If a case is brought to court at all.

As a result, miscreants have little to fear, while victims prefer to pursue justice by their own means.

"At present our system is producing dirty deals, and these dirty deals are in turn reproducing the system," Mr. Ozsoylu says. "As an economist I can't design the reforms we need urgently, but I can say that if something isn't done very soon, we'll have passed the point of no return."

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- 1 Tolerate
- 5 Costume jewelry
- 10 "M.A.S.H." star
- 14 Shaft in a car
- 15 Blended
- 16 Contender
- 17 Citrus fruit
- 18 Steps over a fence
- 19 Mr. Fitzgerald
- 20 PART ONE of a never-say-die maxim
- 23 Stadium level
- 24 Plains entelope
- 25 Gen. Colin
- 26 Lather
- 28 Giffish
- 30 Unshaven bread
- 34 Unleavened bread
- 35 Large shoe size
- 36 Venomous snakes
- 37 John le
- 38 Comic Carvey
- 39 Witness
- 40 Main artery
- 41 Ya dig?
- 42 Concentrated substances
- 44 Conductor's sticks
- 45 Printer liquid
- 46 Infinitesimal amount
- 47 PART TWO of the maxim
- 55 50%
- 56 Church passage
- 57 Tidy
- 58 Basidas
- 59 Bury
- 60 New York canal
- 61 Repeat
- 62 Norman and others
- 63 Presley hit of 1958

DOWN

- 1 Indonesian island
- 2 Head for the winds
- 3 Charly
- 4 Goes back in
- 5 Pete color
- 6 John Jacob or Mary
- 7 Knife in prison
- 8 Marketing stunner?
- 9 Supply with vigor
- 10 Route to achieve something
- 11 Limerick
- 12 Cold-out palace
- 13 Asian sea
- 21 Unctuous
- 22 Open snaps
- 25 Look of the moon
- 26 Desert springs
- 27 Drive dishes
- 28 Shopping areas
- 29 Gillette blade
- 30 Peachy
- 31 Last name in Communism
- 32 Abbey Theatre founder
- 34 Stable female
- 37 Liquor libation
- 38 Held up
- 40 "Karenina"
- 41 Hood's heaters
- 43 Paris tower
- 44 Third basemen
- 45 Ken and Clete
- 46 Loster
- 47 Those people
- 48 Healthy
- 49 "Born Free"
- 50 Salesman's wares
- 51 Charles' pooch
- 52 Roman tyrant
- 53 Increase
- 54 Leave text in

Peanuts

15 CHARLES HOME? I CAME OVER TO ASK HIM TO GO TO A SCHOOL DANCE.

I DOUBT IF HE'D EVER GO WITH SOMEONE LIKE ME, THOUGH, SO I WON'T BOTHER HIM.

FOR SOMEBODY WHO NEVER GOES ANYPLACE, YOU LEAD A VERY ACTIVE LIFE.

Andy Capp

SORRY, DEAR, I COULD WAIT TILL NEXT WEEK FOR THAT HONEY.

I LOVE HIM!

YOU MEAN MY HUSBAND?

SORRY, DEAR, I ALWAYS GET YOU CONFUSED.

THAT'S OKAY, ANDY. I'M SURE HE COULD WAIT TILL YOU HAVE?

WHEN THEY THINK THEY LOOK YOUNGER THAN THEIR DAUGHTER, ALL'S RIGHT WITH THE WORLD.

Mutt'n' Jeff

OH, NO!

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA BUYING A NEW SPRING OUTFIT JUST LIKE MINE?

WHY NOT?

THAT CHEAPENS THE OUTFIT.

HECK, I DON'T MIND. I'M NOT THAT FUSKY!

YOU COULD STAY INDOORS!

KEEP YOUR CITY CLEAN! REPEAT: REPEAT: REPEAT: HERE!

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Expect to run into an argument from a charming person. You and he or she have sort of a love-hate relationship. You get yourselves pretty mad, but it's really fun to make up. If you don't have a friend like this, go find one. They usually hang out at art galleries or coffee houses. A feisty argument will be good for you.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) It's a good day to do paperwork. Unfortunately, that's one of your least favourite things to do. Well, don't let like your whole weekend has to be ruined. Look at it as an investment of time that could save you quite a bit of money. Have you done your taxes yet? That would be an excellent place to start.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) A person from far away will have an idea that could launch you into a whole new adventure. Later tonight another change could take place. This suggestion comes from a partner. It's so outrageous you can hardly believe your ears. That's especially true when you agree to do it. If it's not illegal or fattening, you should be fine.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) How long has it been since you've written your mother a long letter? Even if you see her everyday, she'd love to get one. The words should come pretty easily. There are lots of Cancerian poets, you know. They usually write about cozy domestic scenes, peaceful seashores, of all things, mothers.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) You're probably a little sick and tired of responsibility by now. You never thought you'd live to see the day, but this could be it. Well, you're in luck. All you have to do is lay around and read books. You're learning more quickly, and there's probably something you've been meaning to learn right now.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) This is a good day for shopping. You'll come home with lots of absolutely gorgeous things that everybody wonders how you can afford. Truth is, you can't afford it. That's OK. Sometimes a shopping spree is the very thing you need to get motivated to make more money. Have a great time while you're at it.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) An intellectual relationship could take a romantic turn. It's up to you, which is how you like it. The best place for an interlude is your own home, and the best person have it with is someone who likes to tell you what to do. Did we just say you're in control? You are! Part of being a good leader is knowing when to follow.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Somebody's telling you what to do. He or she is like an annoying fly buzzing around you. Just let this person rant. You'll end up doing what you want anyway. If what you wanted was to stay home and fix up things around the house, your wishes will coincide with the other person's. Might as well, it'll cut down on the noise pollution.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) It's a party weekend. There might be a little stress on your pocketbook, but not to worry. You've earned a celebration. Your biggest problem is an overabundance of opportunities. So many invitations, so little time. Well, it really doesn't matter. You'll have a great time no matter which way you go.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Your whole day may be planned out in advance. In fact, you might not get much time for yourself all weekend. Are you going home to visit with family? They may have expectations you don't share, but you'll have a good time anyway. You're in such a good mood, you won't even be able to help it.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) This is a wonderful weekend for a romantic excursion. Take your sweetheart to the most beautiful place you can find. If he or she is in a cranky mood, just do what you can to make things pleasant. Gentle music would be a good start. It might also help to do whatever your friend wants. That's a nice Valentine's Day gift.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) How about taking your true love shopping? He or she would love it. You're more likely to spend too much than the other person is, if you're with the right person. The right mate for a Pisces should always be somebody with good common sense. An older person might have a surprise for you later tonight, too.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

THE BETTER HALF By Glasbergen

Fine Jewelry

"Anyone can wear diamonds. I want to give my wife something more personal. Can you make a ring from my gallstone?"

JUMBLE THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Arington

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

NOTIX

YAHIR

GAVESA

NERGEE

Answer here: ON THE

Yesterday's Jumbles: PIECE PLUME ADMIRE (SICKEN)
Answer: What the fortune teller charged for her work — MEDIUM PRICES

Glass industries reduces capital from JD10m to JD1m

By Ahmad Al Khatib
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — United Glass Industries (UGI), facing financial problems, said on Saturday it had decided to cut its capital from JD10 million to JD1 million to preserve shareholder's rights.

The three-year-old company also said it had decided to postpone plans for a glass containers factory at least for several years.

Nizar Jaradneh, chairman of UGI board of directors, told the Jordan Times that both decisions were taken in line with recommendations made by the company's technical director and consultants.

"They recommended the postponement of the glass containers factory while keeping UGI alive until the market witnessed some improvements to enable the project become feasible based on their belief that the current crisis will wither in a few years," he said.

"Hence, the board of directors, keen to protect the rights of shareholders

and to gain more time to prospect the future, recommended in the general assembly to maintain the company but to reduce its capital from JD10 million to JD1 million," Mr. Jaradneh said.

"The board also assured them it will exert all efforts to safeguard shareholders' money and interests."

Competition from glass containers produced in factories based in the Gulf, Egypt and Turkey, and a drop in the price of containers made from cardboard, aluminium and plastic (polyethylene terephthalate) inflicted harm on UGI.

The price per tonne of glass containers dropped to JD 215 in 1997 from JD 400 per tonne in 1995, while the feasibility study for the glass containers factory was based on JD 360 per tonne.

The market share of glass containers fell from 28 per cent in 1995 to 15 per cent in 1997 while demand on plastic containers rose from four per cent in 1995 to 30 per cent in 1997 because of a 50 per

cent drop in prices.

Mr. Jaradneh said UGI hopes to enter for the needs of the Palestinian market did not materialise while U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, remained in place.

He said Jordan's nascent glass industries, which lacked government protection, was likely to suffer from global competition.

Jordan signed a partnership deal with the European Union under which both sides would gradually work to create a free trade zone by the year 2010.

Jordan also hopes to join the Geneva-based World Trade Organisation (WTO) later this year.

He said UGI hoped to cover the needs of the Palestinian market, an economy held captive to Israel and look forward to sell products in Iraq once sanctions are lifted.

UGI, Mr. Jaradneh said, began looking for outside markets in late 1995, two years before it started facing financial constraints.

Algeria to merge petrochem with oil monopoly — paper

PARIS (R) — Algeria's three main petrochemical and oil refining state-owned firms will merge with grant state oil and gas monopoly, the Algerian newspaper *Liberte* said Saturday.

The newspaper said the merger move was endorsed by Algeria's energy policy-making high council at energy chaired by President Liamine Zedroui, and would be effective next week.

The petrochemical and oil refiner firms to team up with Sonatrach were named as ENIP-Entreprises des Industries Petrolieres, an oil refining concern based in the eastern city of Skikda and the refiner Nafat (Entreprise de Raffinage de Petrole).

The other firm is Nafat (Entreprise Nationale de Distribution des Produits Petroliers Raffines), the state-controlled domestic distributor network of refined oil products, *Liberte* added.

The merger will put almost all Algeria's oil and gas upstream and downstream activities under the control of Sonatrach.

The move will reverse a strategic policy undertaken by the Algerian government in the 1980s when Sonatrach spun off some activities then considered as secondary to focus in exploring for hydrocarbons, transporting and exporting oil and gas.

The oil and gas industry is Algeria's economy mainstay. Oil and gas sales abroad stood at about \$13.65 billion in 1997, up 9.19 per cent over 1996. They accounted for 96.5 per cent of the total exports in 1997.

Saudi Arabia to decide details of new utility in 2-3 months

RIYADH (R) — The Saudi Cabinet will make a final ruling in two to three months on the details of a new utility company for the kingdom's twin industrial cities, a top Saudi official said Friday.

Saudi authorities said earlier that the utility's equity structure would not be open to foreign investors, at least initially.

"In two or three months the cabinet will decide on all the details setting up the utility company (UCO)," said Prince Abdullah bin Faisal bin Turki, chairman of the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu.

"It will decide on UCO's capital, when in the future private investors will be included and all the details. The concept of UCO, the project in principle, has already been approved," he told Reuters.

UCO is being set up to provide mainly an improved water and power infrastructure in the industrial cities of Jubail on the Gulf and Yanbu on the Red Sea, where utility capacity is already near the limit.

The company was initially expected to set the scene for private funding in the kingdom, which is aiming to curb capital expenditure after more than a decade of budget deficits.

Originally, the plans were for a limited liability company with U.S. construction and engineering giant Bechtel and

U.S. oil services concern Parsons Corp taking 10 per cent each.

But Saudi officials announced in October that the new company would bar foreign investors from the equity structure. Instead, Saudi state firms would own UCO, at least in the beginning.

The new plan has the cities' main utility users — state oil firm Saudi Aramco and majority state-owned Saudi Basic Industries Corp — holding 25 per cent each. The State Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu and the public investment fund will also hold 25 per cent each.

"To keep rates from going up high at the beginning, we do not want independent investors. We'll have users as shareholders," Prince Abdullah said, adding that the project was aimed at accelerating utility expansion.

"We can keep rates lower with the new ownership scheme because independent investors would demand higher return on equity."

The chairman was confident the new company would be commercially viable nonetheless.

"It looks extremely good. We are looking to borrow two-thirds to three-quarters of project finance from banks. We do not need a sovereign guarantee at all," he said.

He said Jubail and Yanbu would require about \$1.8-\$2.5 billion in infrastructure

investments over the next three to five years to meet soaring demand from more than 140 industries based in the cities.

"Utility capacity in Jubail and Yanbu is very close to the limit and demand for investment is going higher and higher. This is why we want to expand."

He denied that buoyant demand had led to blackouts in the two cities. But he said some companies in Jubail had used generators to meet some power demand which the local utility company was unable to supply.

Prince Abdullah said companies based in Jubail and Yanbu that could not wait for UCO's establishment to meet further power demand could accelerate the process by financing expansion until the company is set up.

"If an investor cannot wait for UCO, he has the ability to finance his own utility requirements for which he will be paid as soon as UCO is officially set up," he said.

He said oil company Mobil was currently raising \$300-\$400 million to finance utilities. "When UCO is established, it pays that money back and takes over," the prince said.

Industrial investments in Jubail and Yanbu had so far reached about \$35 billion and the government had invested about \$15 billion in the infrastructure, Prince Abdullah said.

Fewer flowers for Valentine's Day in Hong Kong

HONG KONG (R) — Hard economic times in Hong Kong are hitting lovers.

The number of people buying flowers on Valentine's Day has tumbled as the economy founders, florists said Saturday.

"Our orders have dropped 20 per cent this year," said flower wholesaler Joe Chung. "The economy is very bad. Many retailers have lowered the price of a rose this year."

A saleswoman at Oasis florist in Causeway Bay said sales had halved despite discounts for people not using its delivery service.

She said the price of a dozen roses was kept at last year's HK\$880 (\$114).

Asia's economic crisis has hit Hong Kong's retail, tourism and financial sectors, causing layoffs and bankruptcies.

REUTERS The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.0000	1.8171	0.6116	1.4601	125.11	1.4426	1796.26	2.0480	6.0910
DE Mark	0.5603	1.0000	0.3364	0.8034	69.84	0.7936	987.70	1.1270	3.3619
GB Sterling	1.6350	2.9820	1.0000	2.3976	204.74	2.3686	2636.23	3.3486	9.9580
CH Franc	0.6849	1.2441	0.4186	1.0000	85.86	0.8078	1229.12	1.4035	4.1702
JP Yen	0.0080	1.4518	0.4885	1.1686	1.0000	1.1626	14.34	163.63	4.6666
CA Dollar	0.6932	1.2479	0.4186	1.0112	1.16	1.0000	1231.91	1.4069	4.1831
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0119	0.3405	0.8013	1436.99	0.8033	11.40	3.3919	1.0000
NL Guilder	0.4883	83.70	0.2986	71.28	61.04	0.7042	876.37	1.0000	2.9734
FR Franc	0.1642	0.2982	0.1004	0.2363	20.52	0.2367	33.61	33.6100	1.0000

Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	1.0000	0.7090	3.7506	0.3770	3.6402	0.3064	3.6727	1629.80	3.9960
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	1.0000	6.2900	0.5317	5.1343	0.4307	6.1801	2157.26	4.7884
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1690	1.0000	0.1005	0.097	0.0814	0.98	407.80	0.9082
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8806	9.9485	1.0000	9.66	0.8101	9.74	4057.03	8.0063
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1948	1.0303	1.0303	1.0000	0.0839	1.01	420.17	0.9326
Kuwait Dinar	3.2744	2.3215	12.8099	1.2344	11.92	1.0000	12.03	6008.19	0.9326
Emirates Dinar	0.2733	0.1930	1.0212	1.0212	1.0000	0.0832	1.01	416.45	0.9344
Lebanese L1000	0.65	0.4638	2.4522	0.2485	2.3800	0.1997	2.4012	1.0000	2.2197
Egyptian	0.2946	0.2088	1.1047	0.1110	1.0722	0.0900	1.0818	480.62	1.0000

Energy					
Oils	Last	Previous			
Brent	14.10	14.08			
W. Texas	18.00	15.94			
Bonny	14.10	14.08			
Dubai	12.52	12.13			
UL Gas	160.00	157.00			

Mid-East Currencies					
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY
SA Riyal	0.2666	0.4846	0.16307	0.3944	33.3712
AE Dirham	0.2723	0.4949	0.16653	0.39769	34.0786
KW Dinar	3.2744	5.95238	2.0028	4.7824	409.856
BH Dinar	0.3770	0.4216	1.52232	3.87447	332.005
CY Pound	1.8723	3.4022	1.1448	2.7337	234.244

Metal Prices					
Metal	Bid	Offer			
Gold (oz's)	299.75	300.5			
Silver (oz's)	7.13	7.18			
Platinum (oz's)	386.4	388.4			
AL (3 Months)	1501	1504			
CU (3 Months)	1695	1699			
ZN (3 Months)	1080	1084			
Lead (3 Months)	625	629			
Ni (3 Months)	5695	5710			

Currency Deposit Rates (Bld)					
Period	1	3	6	9	12
Cncy	Month	Months	Months	Months	Year
USD	5.60	6.50	6.50	6.53	6.56
GBP	7.40	7.40	7.25	7.57	7.34
JPY	0.43	0.43	0.48	0.80	0.80
DEM	3.37	3.43	3.38	3.44	3.85
FRF	3.40	3.46	3.61	3.69	3.67
CHF	0.74	0.87	0.88	1.06	1.34
ITL	6.06	6.95	5.64	6.31	6.10

Main Equity Indices					
Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High
New York	DOW JONES	8730.1	0.5	0.01	8734.83
New York	S&P 500	1020.09	-4.05	-0.4	1024.14
London	FT-SE 100	5882.3	29.8	0.54	5882.3
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	16791.01	-383.92	-2.24	17161.1
Paris	CAC 40	3187.73	9.03	0.28	3201.17
Frankfurt	DAX	4502.48	-34.35	-0.78	4508.36

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET									
HOUSING BANK OFFER: 14/02/1998									
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 14/02/1998									
PRICE	12 MONTHS LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF SHARES	NO. OF TRADED	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE
346.000	250.000	AKAS BANK	15.0	1.22	13	1020	316520	230.50	227.00
1.140	1.680	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	9.0	0.00	18	23850	21974	1.75	1.73
1.100	1.850	MID. EAST TRV. BK.	6.2	2.00	1	1	303	1.01	1.01
1.680	1.650	INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK.	10.1	6.18	4	950	1606	1.70	1.69
9.300	4.610	THE HOUSING BK.	29.5	1.94	4	2537	12681	5.00	5.00
4.180	1.080	JOR. EXPRST BANK	10.3	0.00	2	590	1126	1.94	1.94
9.60	5.20	JCP. GULF BANK	4.1	10.14	15	19300	11228	0.69	0.69
4.050	2.700	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	10.7	4.57	15	13162	28401	2.20	2.10
1.170	1.010	UNION BK. SAV. INV.	7.0	0.00	1	100	102	1.02	1.01
1.620	0.820	BETH AL-WAL (BETHRA)	1.5	18.75	3	850	680	0.82	0.80
BANK SECTOR TOTALS									
2.710	1.540	JOR. FRENCH INSUR.	5.8	7.25	2	250	518	2.16	2.07
INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS									
2.050	1.550	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	9.4	5.15	18	11320	20270	1.96	1.94
1.550	1.750	WIDEL. ORIENT. PEO.	16.5	3.61	1	500	479	6.01	4.78
1.550	0.300	NATL. PORTFOLIO	0.0	0.00	2	500	503	2.01	1.00
1.440	1.100	JORDAN INTL. TRAD.	23.6	0.02	1	120	46	0.46	0.46
8.900	1.700	ALRAI	15.2	5.88	1	1000	42500	8.50	8.50
1.500	1.950	MID. EAST HOTELS	18.3	0.00	10	4000	5520	1.21	1.20
4.000	2.600	ARAB INTL. INV. EDUC.	10.3	0.20	6	1350	5306	3.93	3.93
2.150	1.630	UNIFIED CO.	7.9	6.63	3	550	913	1.67	1.67
1.350	0.890	UNITED FOR FINAN. INV.	64.0	0.00	1	1000	1230	1.28	1.23
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS									
4.150	2.740	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	18.3	4.04	2	87	235	2.74	2.72
4.700	3.440	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	12.7	4.32	45	18175	94905	4.58	4.61
1.620	1.310	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	8.7	0.00	1	500	205	0.41	0.41
1.200	0.800	ARAB PAPER CON. TRD.	0.0	0.00	2	1600	1793	0.71	0.75
1.120	0.370	INTERMED. PERO. CHEN.	0.0	0.00	2	200	80	0.41	0.41
3.000	0.990	NATL. CABLE WIRE. MFAC	23.4	0.20	7	550	539	1.02	0.97
1.700	1.530	JOR. SULPHUR-CHEN.	9	0.00	2	350	186	0.55	0.55
1.610	1.150	ARAB PHARM. CHEN.	14.9	5.96	1	200	234	1.20	1.17
1.800	0.820	UNIV. NOON. INDS.	2	1.25	15	8520	6531	0.83	0.81
1.410	0.650	JOR. INDS. RESOURCES	9.7	13.89	7	12303	8881	0.73	0.72
1.500	1.810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	18.5	0.00	5	8500	7850	0.90	0.90
1.900	1.290	EL. 24V. READY YEAR	46.5	0.00	1	2020	2640	1.32	1.32
0.810	0.600	JORDAN STEEL	29.8	7.56	5	2600	1920	0.66	0.66
0.840	0.570	MID. EAST COMPLEX	7.5	18.39	6	2350	2419	0.62	0.61
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS									
105.81	105.81	INDEX	-0.19		106	58122	115692		
GRAND TOTAL									
164.96	164.96	INDEX	-0.64		137	135532	614315		
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 14/02/1998									
1.050	0.980	EXPORT & FIN. BUK. 75-	0.30	0.00	1	1000	720	1.00	0.97
0.810	0.340	JOB. TRADE FAC.	9.9	0.00	14	54900	20313	0.37	0.37
0.600	0.630	NATL. COMMER. CENTERS	0.0	0.00	1	100	60	0.63	0.60
0.680	0.680	UNION INT. 507	0.0	0.00	19	142420	27765	0.70	0.70
1.620	0.360	ARAB PDR. INVEST.	0.0	0.00	25	20300	4345	0.45	0.43
1.000	0.720	AL-SHARQ INT. CO.	0.0	0.00	10000	9500	0.92	0.92	0.92
0.440	0.410	ARAB FOOD & MED.	0.0	0.00	2	10000	400	0.41	0.40
0.500	0.340	ARAB INTL. INV. TRD.	27.8	0.00	30	10000	25576	0.37	0.36
0.750	0.360	NATL. MFG. CONCRETE	0.0	0.00	1	3500	270	1.07	1.08
1.130	0.880	AL-JADID PET. COMPLEX	13.0	0.00	2	7000	11080	0.67	0.67
0.670	0.590	MOJASAT PHARM. CO.	0.0	0.00	6	3000	2785	0.67	0.67
0.750	0.590	RIEAL PHARM.	0.0	0.00	1	500	630	0.67	0.67
0.470	0.340	UNION. ENG.	0.0	0.00	2	1200	132	0.27	0.26
0.550	0.550	ADVANCED PHARM. LTD.	0.0	0.00	7	7800	4733	0.57	0.57
0.490	0.490	NATL. PORTFOLIO	0.0	0.00	2	3500	3650	0.52	0.52
1.110	0.710	OFFICIAL HEARING 75-	0.0	0.00	1	250	60	0.51	0.49
1.000	0.620	NAT. ALUMINIUM. 75-	36.0	0.00	9	3250	5945	0.70	0.69
1.100	1.100	ARAB INT. FOOD FACT.	48.2	0.00	1	13000	13000	1.00	1.00
0.310	0.000	JORDAN STEEL	0.0	0.00	3	3000	3220	1.05	1.05
1.000	0.750	RIEAL PRINT CO. 75-	0.0	0.00	3	6000	2601	0.77	0.77
GRAND TOTAL									
132	132	INDEX	-0.25		132	37980	124723		
V : New 12 months low									
S : Stock dividend during the past 12 months									
L : Listed during the past 12 months									
P/E ratio is 100 or more									
N : Negative P/E									
I : Earning is zero or N/A for the most recent year									

Graf has 'got it wrong about comeback' — former coach

PARIS (AFP) — Pavel Slozil, Steffi Graf's former coach who now works with Russian teenager Anna Kournikova, thinks Steffi Graf is going about her comeback in the wrong way.

Graf, the winner of 21 Grand Slam singles titles and World No. 1 for a record 374 weeks before losing the status to Martina Hingis on March 31 last year, hasn't played a tournament since having a knee operation shortly after being beaten in the quarter-finals of last year's French Open by Amanda Coetzer of South Africa.

And her 'on-again, off-again' plans to return to the Tour are sparking increasing speculation about her future among top players and observers of the game.

The latest episode in the Graf comeback was aborted earlier this week when she had to drop out of the Paris Indoor Open at the eleventh hour after straining a calf muscle in practice.

Normally the injury would not have been considered too serious but it is just the latest in a series of setbacks. The previous week the world waited for her to return to the WTA event in Tokyo — but again Graf pulled out, blaming her withdrawal on reworked pain from her knee.

Slozil, a former Tour player who was in charge of Graf during her early glory years including the 1988 'Golden Grand Slam' achievement (all four major titles and an Olympic gold medal), revealed at the Paris event on Friday that the German champion, in an effort to prove her fitness, had booked five consecutive hours of practice on the even of the tournament.

"That is simply too much," he said. "Steffi is 28 years old and she has

won 21 Grand Slams. She should be easing herself back — not pushing herself to the limits.

"She has got to relax and be prepared to lose some matches. The trouble is she hates losing and I think she is also terrified of the reaction in the German press if she fails to succeed."

Jana Novotna, the top-seed in the Paris Indoor Open and one of Graf's long-standing rivals, is eight months older than the former champion and is playing her first event of 1998 having deliberately bypassed the Australian Open in order to concentrate on her fitness and on being fresh for what could be her last season.

"Nobody knows quite what the situation is — but obviously this latest tournament withdrawal is a serious blow to Steffi," said Novotna, who won her first major title last November when she triumphed in the WTA Championships.

The Czech player, who has played some memorable matches against Graf despite a record of only four wins in 30 encounters, said: "Anybody can drop out of a tournament at the last minute. It is just one of those things, but this has happened to Steffi several times now — so perhaps it is becoming more of a psychological problem for her."

"All of the players would love to see her come back... but it's going to be very, very tough for her after such a long time away to get back to the top."

Novotna said she doubted that Graf, who was told by doctors on Monday to rest for at least a week, would play in next week's WTA tournament in Hanover.

"Making her comeback in Germany

would put a lot of extra pressure on her. I think she is more likely to try to play her first tournament in Linz the following week."

"Of course I could be wrong. Steffi loves a challenge. But she will need to stay healthy and it will take time for her to get back. We shall just have to wait and see."

Novotna's compatriot and coach, Hana Mandlikova, a former singles winner at the Australian, French and United States Opens, doubted Graf would ever climb back to the top.

"She is a very determined and single-minded player. And I am sure she can still do really well in many major tournaments. But it is going to be very difficult for her."

"It has always been tough at the top. But these days it is even tougher. There are so many talented young players coming through," she said, referring to the 17-year-old Hingis who is sitting on top of the rankings after winning four of the last five Grand Slam events — and to the new generation of players, led by the high-biting American teenage sisters Venus and Serena Williams and the 16-year-old Kournikova, who are fast establishing themselves as the elite in the world hierarchy.

French Open champion Iva Majoli of Croatia admitted that Graf was "totally different" from any other player and said that her ambition to return had surprised her.

"I mean — she's won everything there is and done everything there is to do. So why does she want to return? I know that if it were me — I wouldn't try to come back."

Bjorkman comes through stiff test

DUBAI (AFP) — Top seed Jonas Bjorkman of Sweden survived a tough first set challenge from Carlos Moya to advance to the semi-finals of the Dubai Open on Friday.

Bjorkman's 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 victory means he now faces another Spaniard, Alex Corretja for a place in the final.

The second semi pinches former champion Wayne Ferreira of South Africa against sixth seed Felix Mantilla from Spain.

Struggling in what he described as the strongest wind he had ever played in, Bjorkman faced five break points that would have left his Spanish opponent serving for the first set at 6-5.

But Bjorkman survived that crisis, claimed the tiebreak in comfort, and then swept through the second set against the demoralised Moya to win 7-6, 6-1.

"It was tough conditions, but you just have to stay positive, and maybe that was a key to the match. He got more frustrated than me," said the victorious Swede.

"It was extremely hard to even hit the ball sometimes, and I was working hard with my footwork and to be aggressive. The longer the match went the better I played."

Ferreira overcame Germany's Nicolas Kiefer 6-3, 6-2 after play was delayed for more than an hour, and then transferred from Centre to the Number One court because overnight rain had crept under the court surface.

"I was actually the one who noticed it when I practised," said Ferreira.

"I stepped on a crack and water came up all over. They made the right decision to move the match because there was so much water underneath."

Ferreira then adjusted better to the windy conditions and dominated Kiefer. The South African didn't face a break point in the entire match, and was gifted the first set when his German opponent foot-faulted on set point.

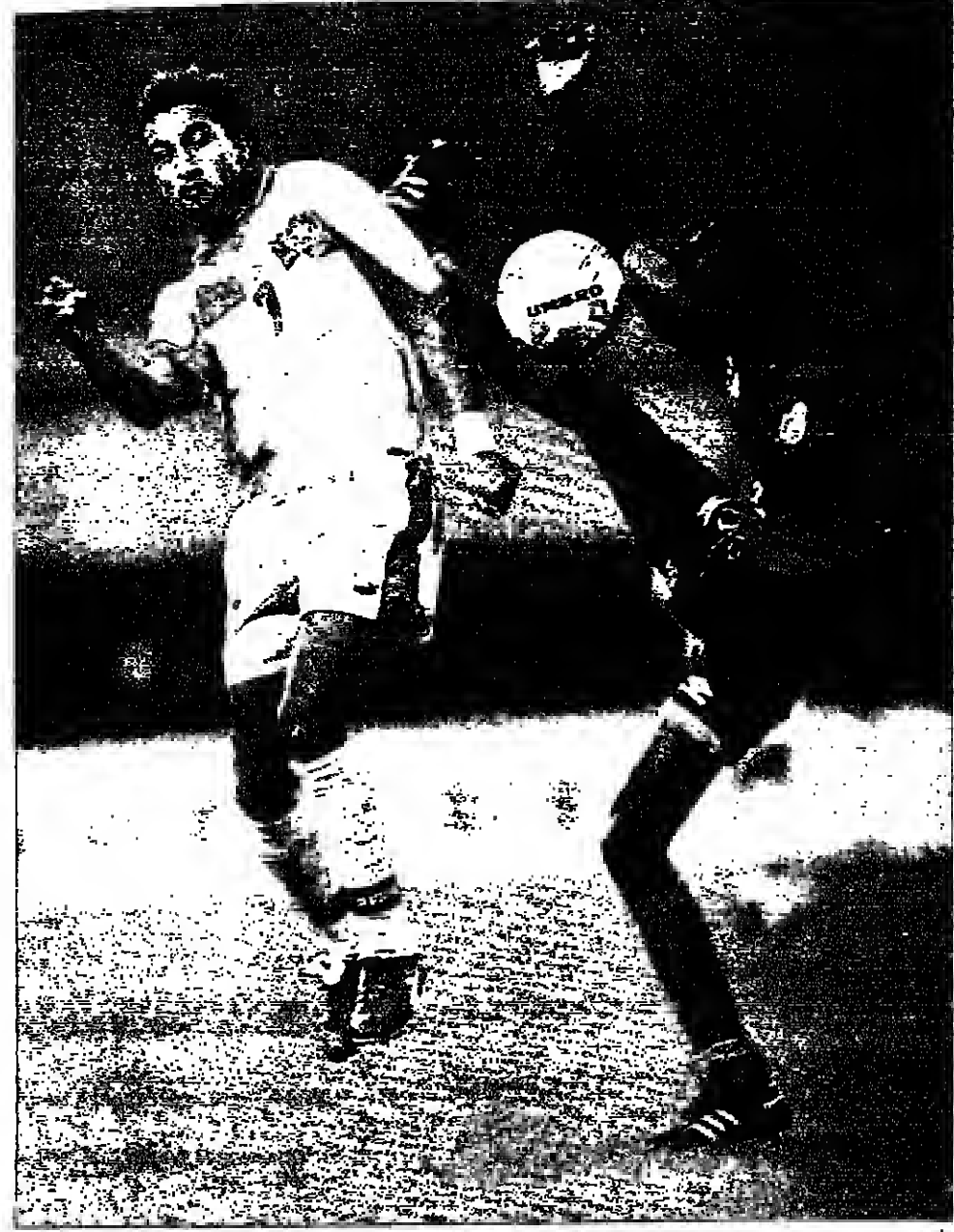
Another double-fault gave Ferreira an early break in the second set and Ferreira broke yet again in the final game.

Injury has seen Ferreira's ranking slump, but he is now back to full fitness and ready to return to the top 10.

"I'm definitely capable of winning this tournament and getting back to the top 10. I'm very close to being back to my best," he warned.

Rain halted play between Felix Mantilla and Alberto Berasategui for 90 minutes with the score at 4-4, and when the match resumed it was Mantilla who edged to a 6-4, 6-4 victory.

In the remaining quarter-final, another all-Spanish affair, fourth seed Alex Corretja outlasted Carlos Costa, taking two hours 40 minutes to secure a 7-6 (7/1), 5-7, 6-4 win.



Moroccan Hadji El Moustafa (L) jumps for the ball with Mozambican Tauludine Nuro (R) during the hosting of the African Nations Cup soccer tournament in Bobo-Dioulasso. Morocco beat Mozambique 3-0 in the Group D match (Reuters photo)

African Nations Cup Egypt through, South Africa and Morocco must wait

BOBO-DIOULASSO, Burkina Faso (AFP) — Egypt have moved into the quarter-finals and World Cup finalists Morocco and South Africa are on course for the last eight as the African Nations Cup here moves into its second week.

Exactly seven days after the February 7 start of this biennial event, which reaches a climax with the February 28 final in Burkina's capital Ouagadougou, the top teams have been excelling as expected.

Hossam Hassan has been the talk of Bobo-Dioulasso with his five goals in two matches as Egypt beat Zambia 2-0 and Mozambique 4-0 to earn their last eight berth with just one group D match against Morocco left in Ouagadougou on Tuesday.

Egypt coach Mahmoud Al Gohary, a former army colonel and who was recalled as coach last March, was particularly pleased with Hossam.

"Hossam Hassan has proved what a great goalscorer he is. It's easy winning matches when you know someone is going to put it into the back of the net when he gets a chance."

"Let's not get too carried away because this is the group stages, but Hossam has been fabulous. And so has the rest of the team — you can't score goals unless you team creates the chances." On a down note for Egypt, midfielder Ahmed Hassan, already hooked against Mozambique and

given a second yellow card for time wasting, misses their final game.

Morocco also have one foot in the quarter-finals following their resounding 3-0 win over competition outsiders Mozambique in group D. Said Chiba scored after 38 minutes. Ali al-Khatibi added another, two minutes later, and substituted Ferhat scored another eight minutes before time.

Morocco have represented Africa at the World Cup a record-equalling four times yet have made little impact on the Nations Cup with just one title. They had come in Ethiopia 22 years ago and the best the Lions of the Atlas have done since is fourth-place finishes in 1986 and 1988, when they hosted the tournament. But they are on course for the last eight even if they have not been particularly outstanding. South Africa, who only had two days to prepare, will go through from group C with a victory over Namibia in their last match on Monday.

However, South Africa, who drew 0-0 with Angola and 1-1 with Ivory Coast, must make sure they beat Namibia. Should South Africa draw against Namibia and Angola draw against Ivory Coast, Angola, who would be on three points along with South Africa, would earn second place in the group behind Ivory Coast, having scored more goals.

Hamburg spoil Cologne's party

BONN (AFP) — Hamburg's 2-1 away victory spoiled Cologne's 50th anniversary celebrations Friday and left at least seven teams in the relegation danger zone.

Neither side produced attractive football and both teams were clearly interested more in points than accolades.

Hamburg pressed hard in the opening half, denying Cologne room in the midfield.

"I think we played one of our best away games," said Hamburg coach Frank Pagelsdorf after the win which propelled the club five places from bottom to 13th.

Hasan Salihamidzic

opened Hamburg's account on the hour and the visitors

went further clear when Bernd Hollerbach converted a free kick while Reo Tretschok's 87th minute goal came too late to alter the final result.

It left a sour taste in the mouths of Cologne's costumed Karneval celebrants who were on hand in the VIP area to toast the club's 50th anniversary.

Hamburg and Cologne are the only two founding members of the Bundesliga who have never been relegated in the German league's 35 years of existence.

In Friday's other match, Borussia Dortmund's 1-0 win in Karlsruhe came thanks to a goal from Heiko Herrlich shortly before half time.

The win puts Dortmund

into eighth spot — just five points away from a UEFA Cup spot next season.

Dortmund finished with ten men after Austrian sweeper Wolfgang Feiersinger was sent off in the 73rd minute for his second bookable foul.

Werder Bremen and Duisburg, meanwhile, shared the points with a 2-2 draw. The game marked the return of Bremen's playmaker Andreas Herzog after four months away because of toe surgery.

On Saturday Stuttgart play leaders Kaiserslautern while rivals Bayern Munich travel to the capital for a showdown with Hertha Berlin.

Knicks win as Bulls upset Hawks

ORLANDO (AP) — Allan Houston scored 23 points and Larry Johnson had 19 to lead the New York Knicks to a 99-83 victory over the Orlando Magic on Friday night.

The Magic got just two points in 24 minutes from hobbling All-Star guard Penny Hardaway, who has been the subject of trade talks with several teams this week. Orlando's leading scorer left in the final minute of the third quarter and finished 0-for-5 from the field.

Chris Mills had 15 points for New York and Charles Oakley had 13 points and seven rebounds before being ejected for a flagrant foul on Outlaw with 3:03 left. Orlando's Derek Harper was ejected less than two minutes later, after fouling Chris Childs. Harper drew two technicals for exchanging words with Childs and then the officials.

• **Dallas Mavericks 85, Indiana Pacers 82, 2 overtimes:** At Indianapolis, Michael Finley hit a game-winning 3-pointer at the buzzer as Dallas soaked a 22-game road losing streak.

Finley, who scored 32 points, snapped an 0-for-8 slump from the field before hitting the game-winning shot.

Earlier, the teams set records for scoring fury as Indiana built a 34-24 halftime lead. That tied the National Basketball Association record for the fewest points scored in a half, set on Jan. 15, 1955 when Syracuse played fort Wayne at Buffalo, New York.

• **Charlotte Hornets 103, Philadelphia 76ers 96:** At Charlotte, North Carolina, Glen Rice scored 40 points as Charlotte held off



Toronto Raptors forward Reggie Slater is out-rebounded by New Jersey Nets forward Chris Gatling (L) in the first period of their NBA game February 13 at the Meadowlands Arena in East Rutherford. Nets blew out the Raptors 130-115 (Reuters photo)

Philadelphia. Vernon Maxwell added 19 points off the bench for the Hornets, who beat Philadelphia for the seventh straight time. Matt Geiger scored 14 points and grabbed 11 rebounds.

Allen Iverson scored 13 of his 30 points for the 76ers in the final 5:21 of the game. His three-point play with 1:16 left closed Philadelphia to 97-93. But Geiger's tip-in and Rice's 3-pointer in the final minute sealed the win.

• **New Jersey Nets 130, Toronto Raptors 115:** At East Rutherford, New Jersey, what was left of the Toronto Raptors after trading star point guard Damon Stoudamire wasn't much, and the New Jersey Nets had no problem beating them.

Kelvin Van Horn had 24 points and 12 rebounds and Jayson Williams had 20 points and 12 rebounds as the Nets overwhelmed the seven healthy players Toronto had on hand less than five hours after Stoudamire and two other players were traded to Portland and coach Darrell

Walker resigned. The Nets never trailed after closing the first quarter with a 13-2 spurt to take a 29-19 lead.

• **Miami Heat 100, Detroit Pistons 86:** At Miami, Alonzo Mourning scored a season-high 39 points with 15 rebounds and seven blocks as the Miami Heat beat Detroit but lost Jamal Mashburn with a fractured thumb.

Mashburn, a starting forward, was injured while attempting a dunk with 7:28 left in the second quarter. There was no immediate word on how long he would be out.

The Atlantic-leading Heat won for the fourth time in five games and beat the Pistons for the 11th time in 12 meetings.

Grant Hill led Detroit with 22 points.

• **Chicago Bulls 112, Atlanta Hawks 110:** At Chicago, Michael Jordan's 4.5-metre jumper at the buzzer lifted Chicago over Atlanta after the Bulls blew a 23-point lead.

Jordan finished with 37 points, scoring 12 of the Bulls' final 15 points and

once again bailing them out in the stretch.

His jumper with 10.8 seconds left put Chicago ahead 110-108. But Steve Smith, who scored 26 to lead the Hawks, then hit a pair of free throws to tie the game with 4.3 seconds to go.

After a timeout, Toni Kukoc rebounded the ball to Jordan, who dribbled past Smith and Chucky Brown before hitting the game-winner.

• **Minnesota Timberwolves 107, Denver Nuggets 80:** At Denver, Stephen Marbury had 22 points and Kevin Garnett added 21 points and 11 rebounds as the Minnesota Timberwolves beat the listless Nuggets.

Most of the 188-centimetre Marbury's baskets came on driving layups and close-in shots, while the Nuggets settled for outside jumper after outside jumper en route to 33 per cent shooting.

The Timberwolves shot 55 per cent from the floor and won for the second time in five games without starting forward Tom Gugliotta.

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	Pierce Brosnan as James Bond	Sherry Long ... in	Harrison Ford ... in	CONCORD "1"	ABDOUN	ABDOUN	THE GOVERNMENT
	007...TOMORROW NEVER DIES	THE BRADY BUNCH	AIR FORCE ONE	RISALA ILA AL WALI (ARABIC)	I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER	SEVEN YEARS IN TIBET	IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE
	Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 3:30, 12:30	Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30	Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	Shows: 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:45	Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas
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				MR. BEAN			
				Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30			



Pierce ousts Huber in Paris

PARIS (AFP) — Mary Pierce, grimacing in pain and needing several visits from WTA trainer Liz Chaffin in the first set because of an injury to her right shoulder, finally won a three-set showdown with Germany's Anke Huber to reach the semi-finals at the Paris Indoor Open on Friday.

But her 1-6, 6-1, 6-2 win left Huber clearly disgruntled and many feeling the German had been cheated.

It was pure Pierce.

The erratic 23-year-old French No. 1 was non-existent in the first set, mixed with unplayable winners with unforced errors in the second, and gave the fifth-seeded Huber no room to work from with her stop-start tennis in the third.

"What can I say?" shrugged a disappointed Huber after the match.

"I thought she was going to retire at the end of the first set. Then she hits winners. It was a strange match. But that's how it is when you play Mary."

Pierce said that she had felt a pain from her shoulder in her first service game — but quickly claimed that her new-style serving action with its lower toss had not been responsible.

"I'm very happy to have won this match and I hope that after treatment tonight I shall be OK for tomorrow."



The Italy-I team of Guenther Huber and Antoniu Tartaglia push off at the start of their first run in the Olympic two-man bobsleigh competition in Nagano. Italy-I led the competition after the first four runs (Reuters photo)

No change at the top in France

PARIS (AFP) — There was no change at the top of the French first division Friday night with the 'triple M' pacemakers — Marseille, Metz and Monaco — all scoring impressive wins.

Marseille came away 4-0 winners from Toulouse, thanks to goals from Dugary (22), Roy (78), Gravelaine (79) and Ravanelli (85).

A 58th minute goal from Jager ensured Metz a 1-0 home win over visiting Strasbourg.

And Monaco beat visiting Le Havre 2-0 — their goals coming from Trezeguet (53) and Ikpeba (70).

But Paris St Germain were plunged deeper into crisis when they crashed 1-0 at home to Nantes — their third consecutive home loss and a result which put manager Ricardo's job on the line.

Bordeaux finally ended their victory drought. After four winless matches they saw off visiting Montpellier 3-1.

And at the foot of the table Cannes beat Bastia 1-0 in a match in which four players were sent off — Baril (54) and Frenay (70) getting their matching orders for Cannes and F. Mendy (61) and Garrido (89) being shown the red card for Bastia.

SCOREBOARD

French First Division			
Cannes	1	Bastia	0
Lyon	1	Guingamp	0
Monaco	2	Le Havre	0
Toulouse	0	Marseille	4
Bordeaux	3	Montpellier	1
P. S. Germain	0	Nantes	1
Metz	1	Strasbourg	0

English League			
Division Three			
Cambridge Utd	1	Lincoln City	1
Colchester	2	Mansfield	0
FA Cup			
Sheff Utd	1	Reading	0

African Nations Cup			
Group D			
Morocco	3	Mozambique	0
Egypt	4	Zambia	0
Egypt qualify for quarter-finals			

Bundesliga			
Karlsruhe	0	B. Dortmund	1
Werder Bremen	2	Duisburg	2
Cologne	1	Hamburg	2

Olympic jinx strikes again at Nagano

NAGANO (AFP) — The Olympic jinx again struck down the reigning world champion in the men's figure skating on Saturday as Norway went top of the medal table.

Russia's Ilia Kulik was the winner while Canadian Elvis Stojko's failure made it the fourth Olympics in a row the defending world champion had lost the Olympic gold medal — and each time the loser has been a Canadian.

The day's big winners were Norway who scored two wins in Nordic skiing to top the medals table.

But Bjorn Daelhlie was forced to wait for his record seventh Olympic gold medal after Thomas Alsgaard, a neighbour back home, did Daelhlie no favours to win the 15km freestyle pursuit in a desperately close finish.

Then Bjarte Engen Vik, who had led the competition after Friday's ski jumping, duly won the Nordic skiing Combined.

Vik, 26, was bronze medalist four years ago in Lillehammer and is the current World Cup leader and there was never any doubt he would not be caught in today's 15km cross-country pursuit.

Eighteen-year-old Samppa Lajunen of Finland who had started sixth fought his way up the field to win the silver medal.

Valeriy Stolyarov of Russia, who was a surprising second in the ski jumping which decided today's starting order, won the bronze medal.

The 26-year-old Alsgaard made up his 24-second deficit on Daelhlie by 8km and then clung to his heels before powering past in the last 50 metres to win by a stride.

"We might be friends but when we get out on the ski tracks we're rivals. It's a big fight to be the best skier at home in Naustad," said Alsgaard.

Daelhlie had no hard feelings.

"I'd have done the same if I'd been in his position," he said. "You can't let friendship enter into it."

Daelhlie added: "I tried to let Thomas go ahead a couple of times but he didn't want to. I decided to go hard in the uphill to wear him out as I knew he was better in the sprint."

Daelhlie said he had not been thinking about a record seventh gold medal.

"I was focusing on the race so I was not disappointed at all. Today I was number two and now I'm thinking of the relay and I'm a lucky guy that I have this man (Alsgaard) beside me in the same team."

Alsgaard, the Lillehammer 30km champion, had pulled out of the



Canada's Elvis Stojko performs in the men's free skating final at the White Ring in Nagano, venue for the XVIII Winter Olympics. Stojko, who won the silver medal, tore his right groin abductor muscle and was taken to hospital after the medal ceremony. Russia's Ilia Kulik won the gold medal and France's Philippe Candeloro the bronze (Reuters photo)



Medallists of the Olympic women's 500 metre race (L-R) Japan's Tomomi Okazaki, Canada's Catriona LeMay Doan and teammate Susan Auch smile during the medal ceremony at the M-Wave Stadium. LeMay Doan won the gold medal ahead silver medalist Auch and Okazaki who took the bronze (Reuters photo)

Nagano medals table

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Norway	5	6	3	14
Germany	5	4	4	13
Russia	5	3	1	9
Canada	2	3	1	6
Finland	2	2	2	6
United States	2	1	3	6
Japan	2	1	1	4
France	2	0	1	3
Austria	1	2	6	9
Netherlands	1	2	1	4
Switzerland	1	0	1	2
Bulgaria	1	0	0	1
Italy	0	3	1	4
Czech Republic	0	1	1	2
Ukraine	0	1	0	1
Belarus	0	0	1	1
Belgium	0	0	1	1
Kazakhstan	0	0	1	1
Total	29	29	29	87



Norwegian gold medallists Bjarte Engen Vik (C) and Thomas Alsgaard (L) pose with compatriot and silver medallist Bjorn Daelhlie after the victory ceremony. Vik won the men's gold in the Nordic combined. Alsgaard won gold in the 15km men's Nordic cross-country 15km pursuit ahead of Daelhlie (Reuters photo)

Russian academy of ice churns out another winner

NAGANO (AFP) — Russia seems to be able to produce Olympic skating champions like Ilia Kulik at will.

Viktor Petrenko in 1992, Alexei Urmanov in 1994, now the assembly line has churned out Kulik, and there are plenty of others ready for Salt Lake City in 2002.

But as with all Russian greats, Olympic success could not be achieved without a little drama.

The 20-year-old from Moscow seemed destined for the top when in 1995 he won the world junior title and the European championship — at his first attempt.

But then came an acrimonious split with his coach Viktor Kudryavsev.

"Viktor taught me from the age of four and guided me to the world junior and European title, but I did not trust him any more," Kulik said of the split.

Kulik became the latest superpower skating exile, moving to Marlborough, Massachusetts to be with Tatiana Tarasova.

The results did not come straight away. He was fifth in last year's world championship but confirmed his renewed threat to skating giants Elvis Stojko and Todd Eldredge by taking the Champion Series title in Munich last December. He missed the European championships last month with a back injury.

As world junior champion he was considered a technical whizzkid. Now Kulik is the kind of classical skater that pleases judges. He can do the big jumps — especially the quadruple — but is also considered a class above the athletic world champion, Stojko, for artistry.

Kulik's music for his free programme was Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, the same as when he took the world junior championship.

"Then I did not care about music. I went through everything mechanically. Now I am more sensitive to music and art. Tatiana Tarasova has taught me to listen to music and interpret."

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PREEMPTIVE STRIKE

East-West vulnerable. South deals.

NORTH
♠ 653
♥ J85
♦ K983
♣ 1072

EAST
♠ 104
♥ 98
♦ A 1087
♣ Q9854

SOUTH
♠ AKQJ7
♥ A 1042
♦ A
♣ A J3

artificial and forcing, and the rest of the auction was natural. When North could do no more than take a preference to two spades, South saw no reason to proceed further.

Mittelman, West, led a trump, and it might seem that declarer has an easy path home with five trump tricks, two hearts and a club. Declarer won in hand and led a diamond to the king and ace, and East persisted with a trump.

Declarer won and drew the last trump before cashing the ace of hearts and continuing with a low heart. West knew that the technically correct play for declarer in this situation is to finesse dummy's eight — it wins whenever the suit breaks 3-3 or East holds a doubleton honor. More importantly, West knew that declarer, a world champion, was aware of the right thing to do. So, without blinking an eyelash, Mittelman followed with a low heart!

Sure enough, declarer played the eight from the table and East's nine won. There was no way for declarer to avoid losing two more heart tricks and, with no entry to the board, two club tricks as well — down one.

JORDAN TIMES FAX: 5696183

Passport Missing

I, SURJIT KUMAR, hereby announces that my Indian Passport No. R946637 Issued in Chandigarh, India, on 3rd June, 1994, has been lost. If found, please deliver it to the Indian Embassy at Jabal Amman. Many Thanks.

Knowing the technically correct play can lead to interesting possibilities. See how George Mittelman of Toronto turned this into an advantage on a deal from an international tournament in Holland.

— South's one-club opening was

GOVERNMENT OF PEOPLE

Economic curbs hinder Mideast peace — PNA

MONACO (R) — Any restrictions on Palestinian economic development will hinder a genuine and comprehensive peace process with Israel, Palestine's Finance Minister Mohammad Zuhdi Nashashibi said.

He told a banking and finance conference here that the Oslo agreement stipulated there should be free trade between the West Bank, Gaza and Israel and only limited restrictions on trade with neighbouring countries.

But that was not the case in practice, he said on Friday evening.

Mr. Nashashibi also said Palestine needed a national currency so it could set monetary policy appropriate to its own needs and that it still wanted compensation for the damage caused to the economy by border closures last year.

"It was agreed that in order to achieve genuine economic development... the Israeli government would facilitate free access of commodities and personnel between the West Bank and Israel, between the

West Bank and Gaza, between Gaza and Egypt and between the West Bank and Jordan, and much to our regret that did not happen," he said.

"At the time our markets are being flooded by Israeli fruit and agricultural products, our agricultural products are not allowed free access to the Israeli markets," he said.

He said that was an example "of how such restrictions will hinder economic development which is very important to achieve a genuine and comprehensive peace process."

He said the economy suffered from not having a national currency, because Israeli monetary policy, aimed at keeping a low level of inflation, was not necessarily appropriate for Palestine which had high unemployment.

"We wish to raise this issue... as long as we are using the shekel as one of the main source currencies, I think we should have a major role in deciding the interest rate for the shekel, which is being decided in Israel," Mr. Nashashibi

said.

The closure of borders between Israel and Palestinian territories last year was another example of how easily the Palestine economy could be hit by policies imposed by Israel, he said. "We were doing well on economic development, even our revenues for first quarter and second quarters of 1997 were good until we faced the problem of closure," he said.

"The closure was a big and very, very erroneous step taken by the Israeli authorities," he said. Mr. Nashashibi estimated the loss to the economy during the period of closed borders at \$700 million — more than double the aid from donor countries granted in 1997 — and that he had raised the issue of how Palestine should be compensated with the European Commission.

He said it was a decision which was not Palestine's responsibility and "I hope that everybody responsible for the closure should take it seriously that it should be compensated."



IN FEAR OF INDONESIAN RIOT MOBS: Residents, with the words 'Muslim' and 'Allah' sprayed on their homes to separate them from the ethnic-Chinese, watch the street after a riot in Ciasem, about 80 km east of Jakarta Friday night. In the most violent day of protests yet in Indonesia's economic crisis, thousands went on the rampage in at least eight towns venting their anger against ethnic-Chinese merchants who they blame for soaring prices and mass unemployment (See story on page 5) (AP photo)

Britain sent Iraq anthrax agent, supplied it with nerve gas antidotes — reports

Combined agency dispatches

BRITAIN AUTHORISED the export to Iraq of equipment that can be used to make the killer disease anthrax as recently as 1994, the Daily Telegraph reported Saturday.

The Anglo-Dutch food and detergents giant Unilever confirmed that one of its British subsidiaries exported about 1,360 kg of so-called growth medium to Iraq between 1991 and 1994.

A Unilever spokesman said the exports were all made in good faith and were authorised by the British Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

"This was all done in good faith with the explicit authority of the DTI. As far as we knew the Iraqi authorities were using the growth medium for genuine medical purposes," the spokesman told Reuters.

The main use of growth medium is to make cultures on which to carry out medical

tests. But it can also be used to produce biological weapons such as anthrax and plague.

Asked about the report on Saturday, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook told BBC Radio he could not comment on the details.

But he added "it is certainly the case that the previous government in the late eighties did allow things to go to Iraq."

"But for many years now the West has maintained very tight controls on what is exported to Saddam Hussein because I think that we have recognised that what was done under previous governments in previous decades was a mistake," said Mr. Cook, who was appointed under the new Labour Party government which took office in May 1997.

The DTI could not be reached for comment.

Britain's Foreign Office last week accused Iraq of failing to account for 17 tonnes of growth medium.

Bruce George, the chairman

of parliament's defence committee, called for a swift investigation into the newspaper report.

"It seems bizarre that we could be granting licences for substances that could prove highly injurious for some of our troops," Mr. George told the Daily Telegraph.

Meanwhile, Defence Secretary George Robertson has promised to investigate claims that Britain supplied Iraqi President Saddam Hussein with nerve gas antidotes after the Gulf war.

"We'll investigate it, but I understand that it probably was exported on the grounds that it was medication, and medications are allowable exports today," he told Channel 4 news on Thursday.

Channel 4 news alleged in a report that after the 1991 Gulf war, U.S. authorities blocked an Iraqi order for antidotes to protect troops against nerve gas attacks.

The Iraqis then turned to

Britain, which in March 1992 supplied the Iraqis with a nerve gas antidote, the station alleged.

The department of trade and industry said it had no comment on the allegations, but noted that since October 1990, it has been possible to export medicine to Iraq for humanitarian purposes.

The Channel 4 news report also claimed that American records show that Britain and the United States contributed to Iraq's chemical warfare capability.

It alleged that the United States exported 14 consignments of biological materials to Iraq between 1985 and 1989, including anthrax bacteria and a botulinum-inducing organism.

The report was based on documents already seen by a U.S. Senate Oversight Committee. There have been previous reports that U.S. companies supplied biological agents to Iraq.

Conflicting reports on outlawed Algerian's alleged surrender

Combined agency dispatches

THE NUMBER two of the outlawed Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), Mustapha Kebir, has given himself up to authorities, two independent newspapers said Saturday, but the reports were immediately denied by a source close to the Islamist group.

The AIS, the armed branch of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) political group, has observed a unilateral ceasefire since October.

Algerian dailies Le Matin and the Nouvelle Republique said Kebir — brother of the exiled head of the FIS, Rabah Kebir, a political refugee in Germany — travelled to Collo early Friday.

He was reportedly accompanied by men in civilian clothing and was taken by car towards Skikda, the newspaper added.

But speaking from abroad, a source close to the FIS said "it's entirely false."

The source added that reports on a surrender by Mr. Kebir were part of the rumours which have been circulating for around three weeks aimed at preventing a larger number of armed groups from joining the truce, which the AIS has urged other autonomous armed groups to join.

In the past weeks, several

Senior French MP Jack Lang visits Algeria

PARIS (R) — The head of the French National Assembly's foreign affairs committee, Jack Lang, arrived in Algiers on Saturday for a two-day visit, Algerian state radio said. The head of the foreign committee of the Algerian lower house, Abdulkader Hajjar, greeted Mr. Lang at Algiers airport. "My stay [in Algiers] is a gesture of friendship as well as an act showing France's commitment to close bilateral relations with Algeria," the official news agency APS quoted Mr. Lang as saying. He was expected to hold talks with leaders of the national assembly later, the radio said.

movements have also announced a ceasefire, but the truce is contested by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA).

Another newspaper, Le Soir d'Algerie, published a few hours later that Mustapha Kebir had been repeatedly sighted in the streets of Collo, eastern Algeria.

Meanwhile, the Algerian government confirmed Friday that an Islamist accused of plotting a spate of deadly bombings in Paris in 1995 is dead.

Ali Touchent, on the run since the bombings that killed nine people and injured 200 others, was first reported dead by independent Algerian newspapers last year. But authorities refused to confirm the reports.

On Friday, Algeria's security forces said Touchent had been killed in May, 1997, along with another Islamist in a shooting near a hotel in downtown Algiers.

They said the bodies had not been immediately identified.

France has accused Touchent of masterminding the attacks which, along with the 1994 hijacking of a jetliner bound for Marseille, brought Algeria's violent insurgency to France, its former colonial ruler.

The GIA — the most violent of Algeria's militant organisations — claimed responsibility for some of the attacks.

The attacks began in Paris on July 25, 1995, when a bomb exploded at the St. Michel subway station in the city's Latin quarter.

Over the next three months, similar bombs made of gas bottles, nails and gun powder exploded on the Champs Elysees and in a marketplace and outside a Jewish school in France's second-largest city, Lyon.

First Islamist party created in north Cyprus

NICOSIA (AFP) — An Islamist political party has been launched in Turkish-held northern Cyprus, the first such development since the division of the eastern Mediterranean island 34 years ago, officials said Saturday.

Forty-nine founders of Our Party, including prominent figures of the Islamic community, formally applied to the interior ministry on Friday for the party's opening, ministry officials told AFP.

The party, according to its manifesto, aims to promote "Islamic ideals" and plans to adopt "whipping" as a punishment for several crimes, and remove taxes for the poor.

The self-styled Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is led by Rauf Denkash at the head of a two-party conservative coalition while two left-wing opposition parties are also represented in its parliament.

The new Islamist party plans to take part in the TRNC's general elections later this year, according to the manifesto.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when mainland Turkish troops occupied its northern third in response to a right-wing Greek-Cypriot coup in Nicosia aimed at unification with Greece.

The TRNC was proclaimed in 1983, but it is recognised only by Ankara which still keeps some 35,000 troops there.

Mainland Turkey's former ruling Islamist Welfare Party of former Premier Necmettin Erbakan was dissolved in mid-January by the constitutional court on charges that it undermined the country's secular regime.

Cyprus prepares for presidential run-off

NICOSIA (AFP) — President Glafcos Clerides appears to have a wafer-thin advantage over his challenger ahead of Sunday's two-way run-off to elect the next president of Cyprus.

With campaigning suspended 36 hours before the poll, Mr. Clerides campaign has been boosted by the combined support of four losing candidates who polled a total of 8.7 per cent in last week's first round.

But both Mr. Clerides and challenger George Iacovou failed to gain the open support of Vassos Lyssarides, the leader of the Socialist Edele Party who won a potentially crucial 10.6 per cent in the first round.

Mr. Lyssarides has been feverishly courted by both candidates in five days of bargaining and has been offered key jobs in a future government by both men, but the Edele leader opted to tell his party faithful to vote "by conscience."

"I believe this was a wise decision. It gives Edele the right to insist that whoever wins the elections keeps his pledge" to form a unity government, said Mr. Lyssarides.

The Edele leader has been offered the post of foreign minister by Mr. Iacovou, while Mr. Clerides has offered to give Mr. Lyssarides the job in charge of the island's membership talks with the European Union (EU).

Mr. Clerides of the conservative Disy Party and Mr. Iacovou, who is backed by the communist Akel and centre-right Diko parties, gained 40.1 and 40.6 per cent respectively in the first round — a margin of just 2,000 votes.

The Greek-language newspaper Agon said Edele's decision to sit on the fence combined with the support offered to Mr. Clerides by the four other candidates "indicated that Clerides would score a big victory."

Cyprus Mail pundit Bouli Hadjiannou said Mr. Clerides had clearly benefited from the week of bargaining, and that Mr. Iacovou's campaign had been hit by his failure to notch up an expected five per cent win last Sunday.

But he added a note of caution.

"The odds may now appear to be in Clerides' favour, yet forecasts are never safe... An analysis of earlier polls carried out before the first round would suggest a close fight ahead," he said.

The winning candidate in the run-off needs to secure 50 per cent plus one vote in the election, which is open only to the 446,731 registered Greek-Cypriot voters on the divided Mediterranean island.

Both Mr. Clerides, 78, and Mr. Iacovou, 59, made television addresses 36 hours before polling pledging to form national unity governments if elected.

"My proposal is straightforward: a government of national unity that will tackle future challenges with determination, patriotism and experience," said Mr. Clerides, warning that a vote for Mr. Iacovou could lead to "dangerous experimentation."

Mr. Iacovou in turned called on voters to look to a fresh future, pledging a unity government under his presidency that would be "for all the people."

The next president will play a crucial role in efforts to settle the division of the island, with a major U.N.-sponsored mediation effort expected to restart in March, and the EU accession talks.

Cyprus has been divided since Turkish mainland troops seized the northern third of the island in 1974 in response to a right-wing Greek nationalist coup in Nicosia instigated by the ruling junta in Athens.

The Turkish Cypriots, who take no part in the presidential polls, declared a breakaway state in the north in 1983 which is recognised only by Turkey. Around 35,000 Turkish troops are based there.

Supermodels cry on meeting Nelson Mandela

CAPE TOWN (AFP) — Supermodel Amber Valetta flushed bright red and burst into tears when her friend Naomi Campbell introduced her to South African President Nelson Mandela on the steps of his Cape Town residence.

Genadendal, Mandela held the waifish blond model, clad in lace cardigan, in his arms and assured her it was wonderful to meet her too, as she sobbed: "You are such a great man."

Valetta, Campbell and eighteen other top models, including Calvin Klein muses, Kate Moss and Christy Turlington, flew into Cape Town this week to model late Italian designer Gianni Versace's last pre-mortem collection at a special show on Saturday night.

Billy Idol to 'represent the '80s' in new comedy

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — The 1980s punk rock legend Billy Idol was chosen for a large cameo role in the comedy "The Wedding Singer," and the acerbic singer decided he would spoof himself.

"We chose Billy Idol because he represents the 80s more than anyone," said director Frank Coraci. "When I was 16, I worshipped Billy Idol."

Farrakhan criticises threat to Iraq

SYDNEY (R) — U.S. black rights activist and Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan on Saturday urged Australia to keep out of any conflict with Iraq and criticised American threats of air strikes.

Mr. Farrakhan, visiting Australia as part of his "friendship tour" of the world, told a few hundred Muslim faithful at a Sydney mosque that Australia had no business in Iraq.

"Iraq has done nothing to threaten Australia," Mr. Farrakhan, flanked by body guards, said after prayers at the mosque.

Australia has committed an elite group of commandos, refuelling aircraft and intelligence support for any U.S.-led attack on Iraq, suspected of hiding weapons of mass destruction.

"My president says that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction," said Mr. Farrakhan,

leader of the U.S. black Muslim organisation "Nation of Islam."

"If he (the Iraqi president) does have them, what have you been doing there with your weapons inspectors for seven years?" Mr. Farrakhan said.

He called the threat of military action against Iraq an attempt to overthrow a "leadership that the West does not like or appreciate."

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